

COLLEGE STUDENTS AND VOCATION:
DISCERNING A LIFE OF PURPOSE

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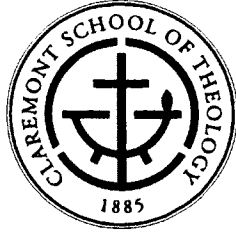
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May 2013

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ABSTRACT

College Students and Vocation: Discerning a Life of Purpose and Meaning

The Rev. Susan Elizabeth Young

This practical theological research study examines how college chaplains, interfaith directors and higher education professionals can support college students in their intellectual, ethical, religious and spiritual growth and vocational discernment. This is accomplished by investigating an existing fellowship program at a small liberal arts college in which students engage in community-based learning and small group reflection and learn spiritual practices to nurture their spiritual growth and vocational discernment.

This researcher uses a dialogical method in which bibliographic and qualitative research engage in critical conversation. The bibliographic research includes a review of the literature in human development theory, the spiritual formation of young adults, theology, spirituality, Christian spirituality, practical theology and religious education. The qualitative study uses a phenomenological approach to develop a rich description of the experiences of fourteen young adults who have participated in the fellowship. The study identifies helpful practical theological methods for nurturing vocational discernment through programs such as the fellowship in question. The study participants provide informational and supportive comments about the program. Many of them still reflect upon the fellowship after graduating from college.

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CHAPTER 1

YOUNG ADULTHOOD AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT THEORY

Introduction

Young adulthood is a time of great promise and possibility as young people leave home to begin college or seek independence in the world of work. During the college years, young adults are introduced to new ideas, perspectives and worldviews that can spark their intellectual, ethical and religious or spiritual growth. As young people wrestle with these new ideas, they also work to identify and refine their personal values and beliefs and consider how these commitments influence the way they see the world. The search to identify meaningful work is part of this journey.

Higher education personnel and other caring adults who desire to nurture the holistic development of their students draw from human development theory to identify the particular challenges, struggles and unique developmental tasks associated with young adulthood. In the following chapter, I discuss the work of several human developmental scholars with a particular focus on young adulthood.

Psychosocial Development

Erik H. Erikson has been described as one of the “well-known grandfathers” of constructive-developmental psychology.¹ He is responsible for developing a psychosocial developmental approach to human development. As a psychoanalyst, Erikson was influenced by Sigmund Freud’s theories on psychosexual development. James W. Fowler observes that Erikson built upon Freud in two ways. First, Erikson

¹ Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 36.

examined how the social environment impacts human psychological development.²

Second, Erikson expanded Freud's theory on child psychosexual development to articulate a theory of psychosocial development for the entire human lifespan.³

Erikson believed that human development relied upon the epigenetic principle, a principle first used by researchers studying the growth of embryos. Embryologists use this principle to refer to the way in which an embryo develops each organ through a biologically predetermined sequence; the healthy development of each organ is dependent upon the healthy development of all organs developed prior to it.⁴ Erikson extended the epigenetic principle beyond birth, arguing that human beings go through eight developmental stages or ages according to a biologically predetermined sequence in the same way that an embryo develops in the uterus. At each stage a person encounters a psychosocial crisis induced by biological (soma) and psychological (ego) growth. One's ability to overcome this crisis is influenced by one's social environment and how one has resolved the crises from previous stages.

Erikson uses the term crisis to refer to a "turning point, a crucial period of increased vulnerability and heightened potential" and not a "threat of catastrophe."⁵ Erikson notes that when a person successfully completes the developmental tasks associated with each stage, he or she receives a psychological strength unique to that stage. As a person transitions to the next stage, he or she must deal with the tasks associated with each previous stage and anticipates future tasks associated with future

² James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 43.

³ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 43.

⁴ Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 35th Anniversary ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1986; reissued 1993), 65-66.

⁵ Erik H. Erikson, *Identity, Youth and Crisis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1968; reissued 1994), 96.

stages. A description of each of Erikson's eras or stages of psychosocial development follows with a more detailed description of the stages of adolescence and young adulthood in light of the ongoing discussion.⁶

Stage One (Infancy): Trust vs. Mistrust – Psychological Strength of Hope:

According to Erikson, the most critical task of ego development is to develop trust which he calls “the cornerstone of a vital personality.”⁷ This occurs in infancy as babies learn to trust that their biological needs will be met by their mothers (or caregivers) and learn to trust themselves as they start to control their physical urges. As infants develop trust, they receive the psychological strength of hope.

Stage Two (Early Childhood): Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt – Psychological

Strength of Will: As infants grow physically, they become more autonomous. With autonomy comes the ego strength of will power. Yet young children also become self-conscious and begin to feel what it means to be exposed to others. This can lead to a sense of shame and doubt.

Stage Three (Play Age): Initiative vs. Guilt – Psychological Strength of Purpose:

Erikson identifies three developments during this stage: (1) the ability to move more freely; (2) the ability to communicate more clearly; and, (3) the ability to imagine and play. These factors lead children to develop a sense of initiative; the emerging psychological strength is purpose. As children become subject to restrictions they may

⁶ This summary is based on Erikson's presentation of his developmental theory in *Childhood and Society*, *Youth, Identity and Crisis* and *The Life Cycle Completed*, Extended Version with New Chapters on the Ninth Stage of Development by Joan M. Erikson (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997). While Erikson originally identified eight stages or ages, Joan Erikson added a ninth stage covering life for people in their 80's-90's as a reflection of the fact that people are living longer. This ninth stage focuses on the way in which our oldest members of society can respond to the physical and mental hurdles associated with the loss of physical and cognitive abilities. For more information, see *The Life Cycle Completed*, 105-114.

⁷ Erikson, *Identity, Youth and Crisis*, 97.

experience guilt when they are disciplined.

Stage Four (School Age): Industry vs. Inferiority – Psychological Strength of

Competence: As children start school, they begin to learn the skills and social norms associated with successful adulthood. With new skills comes a new sense of industry and the gift of competence. But children may also encounter factors that inhibit their industry causing them to feel a sense of inferiority.

Stage Five (Adolescence): Identity vs. Identity Confusion – Psychological Strength of Fidelity: A central psychological task for young people is to develop an identity.

This means that adolescents will begin to consider questions about the type of person they would like to become, explore their goals, hopes and ambitions for the future, and seek to discover a personal sense of purpose. Adolescents are also extremely concerned about how they are perceived by others. Young people experiment with personality characteristics during this stage and use their romantic relationships to consider different characteristics they may like to possess by seeking partners with these particular traits. Failure to develop a strong personal identity can lead to identity confusion. Identity confusion can result in young people running away “in one form or another, dropping out of school, leaving jobs, staying out all night, or withdrawing into bizarre and inaccessible moods.”⁸ Erikson notes that “(t)o keep themselves together” youth experiencing identity confusion “will temporarily overidentify with the heroes of cliques and crowds to the point of apparently complete loss of individuality.”⁹

Erikson suggests that another crucial developmental task for adolescents is to identify an ideology that makes sense or inspires their devotion. Kenda Creasy Dean

⁸ Erikson, *Identity, Youth and Crisis*, 132.

⁹ Erikson, *Identity, Youth and Crisis*, 132.

reminds us that the adolescent's question "Will my life have meaning?" is actually an ideological question.¹⁰ Erikson uses the phrase "ideological system" in a general sense to refer to

a coherent body of shared images, ideas, and ideals, which, whether based on a formulated dogma, an implicit *Weltanschauung* [worldview], a highly structured world image, a political creed, or indeed, a scientific creed (especially if applied to man), or a 'way of life,' [that] provides for the participants a coherent, if systematically simplified, over-all orientation in space and time, in means and ends.¹¹

Erikson builds on Piaget's cognitive development theory to argue that older teens have the cognitive ability to pose hypothetical questions, consider relationships, and other critical skills necessary to make ideological commitments.¹² Erikson writes that young people are looking for "something and somebody to be true" or somebody to whom they can pledge their fidelity.¹³

Erikson notes that adolescence is a "stormy" time for the most gifted youth.¹⁴ He believed that youth should be provided a socially sanctioned moratorium during which they could build an identity and search for a worthy ideology.¹⁵ Society plays an important role in supporting identity development among youth. In addition to providing the moratorium, society must offer young people an ideological system that is worthy of their trust and make young people feel that they have something to contribute to society.

¹⁰ Kenda Creasy Dean, *Practicing Passion: Youth and the Quest for a Passionate Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), 76.

¹¹ Erikson, *Identity, Youth and Crisis*, 189-190.

¹² Erikson, *Identity, Youth and Crisis*, 245 and J. Eugene Wright, Jr., *Erikson: Identity and Religion* (New York: Seabury Press, 1982), 80.

¹³ Erikson, *Identity, Youth and Crisis*, 235.

¹⁴ Erikson, *Identity, Youth and Crisis*, 129-130.

¹⁵ Wright observes that Erikson's concept of a moratorium evolved over time. Wright notes that in *Childhood and Society*, Erikson discusses a moratorium as something youth experience in the process of psychosocial development but over time, Erikson started talking about a moratorium as something youth need to receive from society as they deal with identity issues. See Wright, Jr. *Erikson: Identity and Religion*, 80.

Stage Six (Young Adulthood): Intimacy vs. Isolation – Psychological Strength of

Love: As young adults develop a sense of self, they develop a desire for intimacy with friends and sexual intimacy with a partner. Erikson defines intimacy as “the capacity to commit oneself to concrete affiliations which may call for significant sacrifices and compromises.”¹⁶ Erikson emphasizes that young people must possess a strong sense of identity before they will be able to experience healthy intimacy. He writes that “(t)he youth who is not sure of his identity shies away from interpersonal intimacy or throws himself into acts of intimacy which are ‘promiscuous’ without true fusion or real self-abandon.”¹⁷ Failure to develop healthy relationships can lead to isolation or “the incapacity to take chances with one’s identity by sharing true intimacy.”¹⁸ The psychological strength is mutual love.

Stage Seven (Adulthood): Generativity vs. Stagnation – Psychological Strength of

Care: Adults focus on generativity or what Erikson refers to as “the concern for establishing and guiding the next generation.”¹⁹ Without this, adults stagnate and future growth can be thwarted. The psychological strength is the capacity to care for others.

Stage Eight (Old Age): Integrity vs. Despair and Disgust – Psychological Strength

of Wisdom: Erikson describes the crisis associated with old age as the need to develop integrity. He refers to integrity as “the acceptance of one’s one and only life cycle and of the people who have become significant to it as something that had to be and that, by necessity, permitted no substitutions.”²⁰ Integrity is achieved when one successfully

¹⁶ Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed*, 70.

¹⁷ Erikson, *Identity, Youth and Crisis*, 135.

¹⁸ Erikson, *Identity, Youth and Crisis*, 137.

¹⁹ Erikson, *Identity, Youth and Crisis*, 138.

²⁰ Erikson, *Identity, Youth and Crisis*, 139.

completes the developmental tasks associated with all previous stages; the psychological gift is wisdom. Erikson observes that failure to work through these developmental tasks can lead to a sense of despair.

Erikson's theory of psychosocial development has received much acclaim as numerous scholars and practitioners in developmental psychology, clinical psychology and education draw upon his work for their own research, study and practice. In 1988, James J. Preston wrote a book review on *Childhood and Society* in response to the publication of the 35th anniversary edition in which he describes Erikson's theory as "a monumental achievement that has penetrated into virtually every discipline concerned with the human condition."²¹ Likewise, Sharon Daloz Parks writes that "(i)ts broad application has long since confirmed its intuitive power and fundamentally shaped our maps of change and growth through the human life cycle."²²

However, Erikson has been criticized by Carol Gilligan who argues that Erikson and other human psychological developmental theorists fail to adequately address the developmental experiences of women.²³ Gilligan highlights Nancy Chodorow's study which indicates how the central developmental tasks for boys and girls differ. For boys, the task is to separate from their mother while for girls the task is to form relationships of attachment much in the way their mothers attach to them.²⁴

²¹ James J. Preston, "Book Review of *Childhood and Society*, 35th Anniversary Edition," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 19, no 1 (Spring 1988): 159.

²² Parks, 37.

²³ Carol Gilligan, *In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

²⁴ Gilligan, 8. Gilligan refers to Nancy Chodorow's theory on how the social environment impacts the development of boys and girls in different ways. Gender identity development for boys focuses on separation and individuation whereas girls focus on attachment. Chodorow is critical of the bias in psychoanalytic theory which uses the development processes of boys and men as normative. For more information, see Gilligan, 7-9.

Gilligan notes that women relate to one another from a web of interlocking relationships according to an ethics of care while men value autonomy and separation according to an ethics of individual rights. She argues that Erikson's psychosocial theory represents a male understanding of human development by over emphasizing autonomy. She notes that while the first and eighth stages highlight trust and relationship, stages two, three, four and five celebrate autonomy over attachment which could lead one to conclude that women's need for relationship impedes their development.²⁵

She also criticizes Erikson for failing to adequately talk about the differences in development he observed between males and females in late adolescence and young adulthood. Gilligan notes that Erikson acknowledged in *Youth, Identity and Crisis* that while a young man will complete the task of identity formation before dealing with the task of intimacy, a young woman will combine these tasks as she "comes to know herself as she is known, through her relationships with others."²⁶ However, Erikson's charts do not reflect this difference which leads her to conclude that the "male experience continues to define his life-cycle conception."²⁷

I add that Erikson's emphasis on autonomy represents his bias as a member of a white, Western society. In other cultures, the values that are privileged are often collectivistic in nature. For example, in many cultures, young people are expected to sacrifice personal autonomy to meet their parents' expectations. Many parents will even dictate the student's choice of academic major and career. This often leads the young person to experience stress and depression. This will be discussed in more detail later.

²⁵ Gilligan, 12-13.

²⁶ Gilligan, 12.

²⁷ Gilligan, 12.

The Evolving Self – A Theory on Ego Development

Robert Kegan offers a constructive-developmental theory of ego development. The central premise underlying Kegan's theory is his assertion that to be human is to make meaning.²⁸ Kegan argues that constructing meaning is the fundamental task of human existence that starts with birth and continues through out the entire life cycle. Based on this principle, Kegan utilizes a constructive-developmental framework to study the phenomenon he calls "the evolution of meaning" or the evolution of the human ego.²⁹

Building upon Jean Piaget, Kegan argues that the process of human ego formation is a constant activity to construct meaning based on how one understands the relationship of self and other. Kegan suggests that it is possible to identify periods in the human life cycle when the process of interpreting self and other achieves a temporary balance; he refers to these occasions as "evolutionary truces."³⁰ Kegan identifies a sequence of six evolutionary truces to the human life cycle. He contends that each evolutionary truce represents a more complex, differentiated understanding of the self-other relationship than the truce preceding it.

Another important aspect of Kegan's theory is his suggestion that there are two universal yearnings that guide human life: "the yearning to be included" and "the yearning to experience one's distinctiveness."³¹ Kegan argues that human beings are driven by these two conflicting yearnings through out their life; an evolutionary truce

²⁸ This summary of Kegan's work is based on his description in *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

²⁹ Kegan, *The Evolving Self*, 15.

³⁰ Kegan, *The Evolving Self*, 39.

³¹ Kegan, *The Evolving Self*, 107.

represents “a temporary solution” to the tension between these two yearnings.³² Within each truce, one of these two yearnings will dominate how the self understands the self-other relationship.

Kegan also discusses the role the immediate environment plays in ego development. He refers to the “culture of embeddedness” which is a series of psychosocial environments which “hold us” and “let us go.”³³ He suggests that a human being is more than just an “individual” which refers to a person’s “current state of evolution;” she or he is also an “embeddual” which “refers to the fundamental motion of evolution itself.”³⁴ Kegan writes that “(t)here is never just a you” and that “your own sense of wholeness or lack of it is in large part a function of how your current embeddedness culture is holding you.”³⁵ Kegan identifies three important roles for the culture of embeddedness: (1) it must affirm the process of growth; (2) it must encourage evolution to the next truce; and, (3) it must support the person as he or she goes through the difficult task of reintegrating a new understanding of the self-other relationship. A brief description of Kegan’s evolutionary truces follows.

The Incorporative Self: This stage refers to the early period of infancy when a baby cannot make a distinction between self and other. Mother figures serve as the culture of embeddedness. Their task is to hold infants close for comfort but to also let the baby-turned-toddlers go by encouraging autonomy.

The Impulsive Self: Young children are able to distinguish between self and other but tend to confuse their impulses with those of their family. Children are subject to their

³² Kegan, *The Evolving Self*, 108.

³³ Kegan, *The Evolving Self*, 116.

³⁴ Kegan, *The Evolving Self*, 116.

³⁵ Kegan, *The Evolving Self*, 116.

impulses and their actions are based on their desires. The task of the family as the culture of embeddedness is to encourage children to become less egocentric by holding them responsible for their feelings and actions and recognizing their growing self-sufficiency.

The Imperial Self: Kegan suggests that older children, preadolescents and adolescents at this stage are embedded in their own needs. Thus, they relate to others in terms of how they can help the self meet these needs. The culture of embeddedness, composed of peers, family and teachers, can help children or adolescents evolve by expecting mutuality in relationships.

The Interpersonal Self: While adolescents leaving home for college or to live independently are located in this truce, it is hard to say if or when people progress out of this truce. In this balance, a person develops the capacity to appreciate mutuality in relationships. The self is therefore embedded in interpersonal relationships; the self experiences completeness through his or her relationships. The culture of embeddedness can help young adults evolve by teaching them to take responsibility for their own initiative and helping them differentiate between who they are and the roles they play in their relationships.

The Institutional Self: The self has now developed a sense of autonomy and a personal sense of identity. Relationships are important but become secondary to maintaining one's sense of self and one's system of meaning. The self is focused on personal achievement and career success. The self also accepts the authority of social institutions, laws and cultural influences. The culture of embeddedness can support evolution by encouraging independence and achievement but resist attempts by the person to avoid intimacy or to form relationships that are not mutual.

The Inter-Individual Self: The self now has an appreciation for his or her intrinsic value as a whole self. With this inner strength, he or she can enter into mutually affirming relationships of love, care, intimacy and trust. They are also able to appreciate the distinction between having a career and being one's career and can distinguish between the self and the institutions to which he or she belongs.

Kegan examines how his theory of the evolving self intersects with religious and spiritual growth. He offers helpful advice to educators about how to support people through out their lives as they engage in the ongoing task of making meaning. First, he reminds us to distinguish between the individual and his or developmental stage; he writes that "persons are a motion, a creative motion, the motion of life itself."³⁶ Second, he reminds us that as human beings go about the task of composing meaning, we also try to discern our relationship to the "ground of being which is doing the composing."³⁷ Third, he invites people in Western cultures which tend to privilege the yearning for distinctiveness to recognize the strength of inclusion as celebrated by Eastern cultures and vice versa. He makes this same plea to men and women and suggests that when we can embrace both ultimate yearnings, we will be able to "give expression to the full complexity of being alive."³⁸ We will be able to experience hope, "a hope which living things do not 'have' so much as a hope which living things *are*, a hope which all living things do not share so much as it shares them."³⁹

Kegan draws comparisons between his theory with Tillich's and Niebuhr's

³⁶ Robert Kegan, "There the Dance Is: Religious Dimensions of a Developmental Psychology," in *Toward Moral and Religious Maturity: The First International Conference on Moral and Religious Development*, eds. Christaine Brusselmans and James A. O'Donohoe (Morristown, NJ: Silver Burdett Company, 1980), 407.

³⁷ Kegan, "There the Dance Is," 411.

³⁸ Kegan, "There the Dance Is," 418.

³⁹ Kegan, "There the Dance Is," 414-415. Italics in the original.

understanding of Divine revelation. Both theologians suggest that revelation of the ground of being or the Divine is a reality in human existence or “something which may occur again and again in the concrete world and through the natural processes of growth.”⁴⁰ Kegan suggests that our attempt to understand the meaning of this revelation is integral to our lifelong process of constructing meaning as outlined by his constructive-developmental framework.⁴¹ Kegan also emphasizes the importance of using this framework to consider our “relation to the process which subtends and creates them” in order that we may encounter the sacred in every day life.⁴²

Kegan offers three helpful recommendations for religious educators. First, we need to understand human development theory so that we can attend to children, youth and adults where they are in their effort to construct meaning. Second, he reminds us that “(d)velopment is costly” as individuals deconstruct and reconstruct understandings of ultimate concern and that our task is to support this growth process rather than to pathologize it.⁴³ Third, Kegan invites us to consider how faith communities can support individuals at “each developmental meaning-system.”⁴⁴

Faith Development Theory

James W. Fowler’s theory of faith development is an important contribution to psychological development theory. This theory is based on a particular understanding of faith. Fowler believes that “faith is a human universal” by which he means that human

⁴⁰ Kegan, “There the Dance Is,” 424.

⁴¹ Kegan, “There the Dance Is,” 424.

⁴² Kegan, “There the Dance Is,” 437-438.

⁴³ Kegan, “There the Dance Is,” 439.

⁴⁴ Kegan, “There the Dance Is,” 440.

beings are born with “nascent capacities for faith.”⁴⁵ Fowler makes a distinction between faith and religion. He defines faith as trust in some other person and/or a “transcendent center of value and power.”⁴⁶ Religion is a coherent set of beliefs held together as one comprehensive system of sacred texts, traditions, symbols, rituals, creeds, ethical teachings and other elements.⁴⁷ This is an important distinction for Fowler: all human beings have faith but not all human beings place their faith (or trust) in a religion.

Second, Fowler contends that faith is relational. He describes faith as a triad of interdependent relations between self, other and “a shared center(s) of value and power” to which both the self and other give their fidelity or trust.⁴⁸ Third, Fowler links faith to imagination. Through imagination, human beings are able to interpret images, symbols and rituals into “an ultimate environment” of meaning which contains and revolves around the shared center of value and power.⁴⁹ Fourth, Fowler defines faith as “an active mode of know and being.”⁵⁰ He suggests that to understand faith as knowing we must look at rational, cognitive knowing and affective, emotional knowing. Fowler uses each of these aspects of faith to develop a list of seven core capacities by which a person’s faith is assessed and assigned to a stage.

Fowler describes six distinct stages of faith that are sequential, invariant and hierarchical. Fowler claims that every human being grows in his or her understanding of faith in the same order (sequential), that no stage can be skipped (invariant), and that each stage is more complex than the previous stage (hierarchical). He argues that stages of

⁴⁵ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, xiii.

⁴⁶ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 14.

⁴⁷ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 14.

⁴⁸ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 16-17.

⁴⁹ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 28.

⁵⁰ James W. Fowler, “Faith and the Structuring of Meaning,” in *Faith Development and Fowler*, eds. Craig Dykstra and Sharon Parks (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1986), 19.

faith are not epigenetic and that a person may stay at the same stage his or her entire life.

Fowler argues that transition from stage to stage can be painful but that with each transition a person adopts a more complex understanding of faith that encompasses the wisdom of all previous stages. Fowler believes that each stage maintains its own unity and that one transitions to the next stage when we experience a loss of equilibrium due to life events, changes in one's social, political or economic environment, or growth in one of the seven core parameters of knowledge. These capacities include: (1) form of logic (based on Piaget's theory); (2) perspective taking abilities (based on Selman); (3) form of moral judgment (per Kohlberg); (4) bounds of social awareness; (5) locus of authority; (6) form of world coherence (how one composes meaning and relates to one's ultimate environment); and, (7) symbolic function (one's capacity to image or interpret symbols.)

A summary of Fowler's stages follows.

Pre-Stage of Undifferentiated Faith:⁵¹ This is the basic sense of trust babies develop during the first two years of life.

Stage One: Intuitive-Projective Faith (age 3 to 6):⁵² Children understand faith as they see it imitated by parents and through their intuition. Children have active imaginations but without formal logic skills, fantasies hold a lot of power. Fowler recommends using

⁵¹ In *Stages of Faith*, Fowler identifies six stages and refers to the "Undifferentiated faith" of infancy as a pre-stage; in the more recent essay "Faith and the Structuring of Meaning," he identifies seven stages including a "Primal Faith" stage that covers this time period. See Fowler, "Faith and the Structures of Meaning," 28-31.

⁵² Although Fowler's stages are not epigenetic, he does indicate the age range that people are most likely to be for each stage based on his interview research. Fowler includes his interview data in an appendix to *Stages of Faith* in which he notes that 50 percent of the youth he studied were in stage 3 while another 28.6 percent were in the transition between stage 3 to 4; another 12.5 percent were transitioning from stage 2 to 3 while only 5.4 percent were in stage 4. He also found that 40 percent of the people in his study ages 21-30 were in stage 4, 33.3 percent were in transition from stage 3 to 4, and smaller percentages found in stages 2 or transition from stage 2 to stage 3 while only 3.3 percent were in the transition from stage 4 to 5. See Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 317.

stories, songs, symbols and activities that will connect with children's intuitive knowledge.

Stage Two: Mythic-Literal Faith (age 6 to 12): Children (and some youth and adults) are now able to understand cause and effect, differentiate between self and other, distinguish between make believe and real life, and they are beginning to develop the ability to understand another person's perspective. Stories hold meaning but children are not able to step back from the stories to discern the larger meaning of these stories.

Stage Three: Synthetic-Conventional Faith (age 13-20): With a new ability to understand formal operational thought, adolescents can now understand abstract thinking. Mutual perspective taking is developed on interpersonal terms. As adolescents seek to build their identity (per Erikson), they struggle with the "tyranny of the they," a term Fowler borrows from Sharon Daloz Parks which refers to a young person's reliance on others for affirmation.⁵³ Youth will adopt the values, ideas and opinions of others to fit in and belong.

Faith is considered conventional because it reflects the faith of the young person's religious community. The particular beliefs that compose this faith have not been carefully questioned. Adoption of these faith commitments is part of the quest for a meaningful ideology (per Erikson). Fowler suggests that young people perceive God as Divine Other and as a friend and companion. Fowler observes that adults may stay at this stage for their entire life.

Stage Four: Individuative-Reflective Faith (20 and older): With a strong sense of self, young adults begin to critically examine their faith commitments and political and

⁵³ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 154.

social beliefs. Their capacity for third person perspective taking also helps them make these decisions. People at this stage are able to discern who they are apart from the way they are defined in their relationships. Fowler notes that many adults do not enter this stage until their 30's or 40's and many will stay here for their entire life.

Stage Five: Conjunctive Faith (adulthood): People now see the importance of dialogue as a way of knowing and becoming known in terms of Buber's "I-Thou" relationship. Thus, dialogue is engaged to expand one's boundaries. People in this stage embrace paradox and accept tensions inherent in faith and belief. Further, they are able to recognize that truth may be approached from a variety of ways. Through dialogue, critical reflection and engagement, they also identify perspectives and prejudices based on social location, race and religion.

Stage Six: Universalizing Faith (adulthood): Finding unity with the Ultimate rather than the self for identity becomes the focus for people in this last stage. People are able to set aside concerns for self in order to practice self-emptying love and compassion. These people also have a strong commitment to social justice. Fowler points to Mother Teresa, Gandhi, Thomas Merton, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Abraham Heschel as examples.

Fowler's theory on faith development has stimulated much conversation among theologians, religious educators and other professionals. Some, such as Catholic religious educator Thomas H. Groome, argue that Fowler offers critical insights into how people mature in their faith and that his work "can fruitfully inform both our design and

our implementing of religious education practice.”⁵⁴ Others are more critical.

One set of critiques relate to Fowler’s definition of faith and the distinction he makes between faith as a universal human activity and religion. John McDargh suggests that what we believe about God (our religion) influences our self-perceptions and worldview too much to be separated from the “how” (faith) we believe in God.⁵⁵ James Loder suggests that Fowler fails to consider the role faith plays in providing hope in times of crisis or to see faith as a constant, dynamic activity that has the power to transcend any stage of equilibrium. He also argues that Fowler fails to acknowledge that human faith finds the strength to grow as a result of encounters with God. Further, faith in the Bible is not abstract but concrete, responding to specific historical situations. Loder writes: “(w)here there is faith, then and there, at the point of encounter, existence becomes whole and is healed not as an expression of human fulfillment but by and for the purposes of God.”⁵⁶

Maria Harris also offers important critiques. She invites Fowler to use a more inclusive conception of faith by including artistic knowing.⁵⁷ She also questions if Fowler focuses too much on the linear development of faith at the cost of seeing the fluidity of faith development. In addition, she invites Fowler to critically examine the way his theory, which is built upon Kohlberg, Piaget, Erikson and Selman, may include the gender bias issues Gilligan has observed.

Fowler’s stage six has also been the subject of critique. Some, including Loder,

⁵⁴ Thomas H. Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980; reprint: San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 66.

⁵⁵ John McDargh, “Faith Development Theory at Ten Years,” *Religious Studies Review* 10, no. 4 (Oct. 1984): 340.

⁵⁶ James Loder and James W. Fowler, “Conversations on Fowler’s *Stages of Faith* and Loder’s *The Transforming Moment*,” *Religious Education* 77, no. 2 (March-April 1982): 136.

⁵⁷ Maria Harris, “Completion and Faith Development,” in *Faith Development and Fowler*, 115-133.

have a hard time with this last stage. While stages one through five seem to be descriptive in nature, stage six seems like an ideal. Is it a realistic goal for human beings or is it too idealistic? And, is it appropriate to build a model of faith development based on a normative end stage?⁵⁸ As Fowler notes himself, only one person in his study reached this last stage.⁵⁹

While I find Fowler's discussion of faith helpful, I find merit in some of the criticism he has received. I agree with Loder and others that Fowler does not pay enough attention to the activity of the Divine while overemphasizing our human response to God. I agree that it is hard to separate the content of my faith from my development of that faith: what I believe about God shapes how I understand what it means to be human and how I am to live in relationship with God and others and how I live my life helps me deepen my understanding of God.

Like Harris, I wonder how accurately Fowler depicts the faith experiences of both men and women. And, as a related concern, I question how Fowler's model may or may not apply to people in other religious traditions. While he focuses on faith as a universal experience, he uses Judeo-Christian language to provide details about the nature of faith in each stage. In addition, only 3.6 percent of the people interviewed for *Stages of Faith* represented religions other than Christianity or Judaism.⁶⁰ Fowler's sample was also predominantly White; only 2.2 percent of those he interviewed were Black compared to 97.8 percent who were White.

At the same time, I agree that Fowler has made important contributions towards

⁵⁸ Loder, "Conversations," 137.

⁵⁹ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 318-319.

⁶⁰ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 316-317.

understanding how people develop certain knowledge, skills and capacities that help us mature in our ability to think about faith. And, Fowler has done some outstanding work on the notion of vocation based on this faith development theory. Thus, I find myself agreeing with religious educators such as Craig Dykstra who recommend that religious educators use a dialogical approach to Fowler's theory.⁶¹ Dykstra suggests that religious educators develop their own goals for religious education and then use Fowler to assess what skills are necessary for students to achieve these goals and to revise these goals in light of Fowler's research.

Finally, as I work with young adults who are more likely to identify themselves as spiritual than religious, it strikes me that there are similarities between how students use the word spiritual and Fowler's understanding of faith. Both refer to a process of actively seeking to construct meaning, to understand how one should live in relationship to other people and the larger world, to identify meaningful vocation and to experience transcendence or to live life for something larger than oneself.

For example, one of the participants in this study is Sophia. Sophia does not identify with a particular religious or spiritual tradition but she does think spirituality is important to her life and she contemplates a variety of spiritual questions.

⁶¹ Craig Dykstra, "Faith Development and Religious Education," in *Faith Development and Fowler*, 251-271.

Sophia wrote on her pre-interview questionnaire:

I often contemplate spiritual questions about my life. While I struggle with my definition of a Higher Power, I find that I am most in awe when I am in nature. Even the smallest elements of nature, for me, seem to be evidence of divinity. The complex diversity that exists in our world, from the environment to interpersonal relations, compels me to find balance within my own spirituality. At the very least, I identify with being connected to [a] larger whole and life force within this world. This motivates me to not only be the most compassionate person possible, but also give more of myself to others. Through dedication to a greater good and hope for a more just world, I find meaning and truth in my life.

Likewise, Samantha, a 22-year-old young woman who graduated from college in May 2012, does not identify with a particular religious or spiritual tradition. However, she does contemplate a variety of spiritual questions. On her questionnaire, she noted: “I think about the meaning of both life and death in relation to other people, other living things, and the environment. I also think about the presence of a ‘higher’ power, gods, spirits, and angels.” During her interview, Samantha noted that while she is not necessarily actively looking for an answer to whether or not these things are real, they are things that she thought about more as she started to mature and form her own thoughts and opinions.

Intellectual and Ethical Development

William G. Perry, Jr., author of *Forms of Ethical and Intellectual Development in the College Years: A Scheme*, has influenced the work of numerous human development scholars. These include Robert Kegan and Sharon Daloz Parks. Parks writes that Perry “was a master educator, therapist, and theoretician who, with his colleagues, forged the most groundbreaking and widely applied study of human development in the context of

higher education.”⁶²

Perry and his colleagues examined how young adults construct meaning based on their understanding the nature of knowledge and value.⁶³ Perry and his colleagues identified a scheme or sequence of nine Positions in which young adults find themselves based on his work with students from Harvard and Radcliffe Colleges in the 1950's and 1960's. Other researchers have conducted studies to confirm the validity of the scheme.⁶⁴

Perry examines how people “interpret experience meaningfully.”⁶⁵ He writes that making sense of any given moment is the result of

a highly complex and selective interaction of forms derived from two pools: (1) the pool of those forms or orderings a person brings with him to the moment as expectancies; (2) the pool of those forms humanly discernable as “inherent in the environment” of the experience (physical, social, internal, etc.).⁶⁶

Meaning is discerned in the way in which a person's expectancies meshes or not with his or her experience. Perry writes:

The work of making sense will consist of some balance between two processes: (1) *assimilation* of the emerging forms of the experience to the forms of expectancies the person brought with him (by means of selection, simplification, or distortion), and (2) *accommodation* of the forms of expectancies to the forms emerging in the experience (by means of recombinations and transformations which result in new forms of expectancy.)⁶⁷

⁶² Parks, 45.

⁶³ William G. Perry, Jr., *Forms of Ethical and Intellectual Development in the College Years: A Scheme* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 52-53.

⁶⁴ Perry's original study has several limitations: (1) the study draws upon the experiences of male students; (2) the study uses students from only one college; and, (3) the college in question was an elite institution with a less than diverse student body. L. Lee Knefelkamp suggests that in subsequent years, other researchers, including himself, have developed assessment tools that “have facilitated the measurement of tens of thousands of students of all types of American colleges and universities. Careful records have been kept that indicate that the model is useful with a wide range of diverse students. Its efficacy remains strong, and there continue to be studies that extend the range of students for whom the general characteristics of intellectual development are accurate and valid.” See L. Lee Knefelkamp, “Introduction,” in Perry, Jr., xv-xvi.

⁶⁵ Perry, Jr., 46.

⁶⁶ Perry, Jr., 46

⁶⁷ Perry, Jr., 46. Italics in the original.

Perry considers how young people move from understanding knowledge and value in dualistic terms (right or wrong) based on insight from trusted sources of authority towards their ability to understand that all knowledge is contextual and informed by critical reflection of one's own experience.⁶⁸ The first three Positions can be grouped together as "The Modifying of Dualism" in which the young person moves from basic duality to acknowledging Multiplicity or recognizing that people may have more than one way of understanding something.⁶⁹ Positions 4 through 6 or "The Realizing of Relativism" describe how the young person moves from understanding Multiplicity as problematic to accepting "contextual Relativism" to understanding his or her need to make a personal Commitment within a world of relativism.⁷⁰ Positions 7 through 9 reflect "The Evolving of Commitments" through which the young adult accepts relativism and makes the decision to take responsibility for his or her own understandings, knowledge and values.⁷¹

Position 5, which Perry describes as revolutionary, is pivotal.⁷² It is at this point that young adults accept that all knowledge is contextual and relativistic. The transition from Position 5 to 6 is also important because this is when the young adult accepts that he or she must actually take responsibility for one's own vocation, values, religion and other Commitments even though he or she is not ready to do so. The student will begin making these Commitments at Position 7 and beyond.

⁶⁸ For the purposes of this discussion, I draw from Perry's own description of how the nine Positions can be divided into three different positions. Perry, 64-65. Others, including Sharon Daloz Parks, have grouped the nine Positions according to the following framework: (1) Authority Bound Dualistic; (2) Unqualified Relativism; (3) Commitment in Relativism; and, (4) Convictional Commitment. Parks builds upon this description to offer her own understanding which is discussed later in this chapter. See Parks, 54-70.

⁶⁹ Perry, Jr., 64-65.

⁷⁰ Perry, Jr., 65.

⁷¹ Perry, Jr., 65.

⁷² Perry, Jr., 121.

Perry identifies three responses students could adopt if they become confused or overwhelmed in any of the nine Positions. Students could “Temporize” or pause in growth over an extended period of time.⁷³ They could “Retreat” or regress back into the dualism of the earlier positions.⁷⁴ Or, they could “Escape” or withdraw to avoid “personal responsibility.”⁷⁵

While Perry’s scheme consists of nine different Positions, Perry and his research team did not actually identify students in Position 1. He writes that this first Position is really “an extrapolation generated by the logic of the scheme.”⁷⁶ Likewise, Position 9 suggests a maturity level that few undergraduates achieve during college and is “an extrapolation rounding out the limits of the scheme.”⁷⁷ Perry found that freshman students interviewed at the end of their first year tended to express views consistent with Positions 3, 4 and 5 while seniors were likely to identify with Positions 6, 7 and 8.⁷⁸

Perry was a strong advocate for higher education reform. He argued that faculty must provide appropriate support to students as they progress through the various Positions of this scheme and as they potentially struggle with Temporizing, Retreat or Escape. Perry strongly disagreed with the notion that faculty are not responsible for supporting the moral development of their students. In fact, he emphasized the interrelationship between the student and teacher in the learning process, writing: “(e)pistemologically the knower and the known are now inseparable.”⁷⁹

⁷³ Perry, Jr., 198-199.

⁷⁴ Perry, Jr., 204.

⁷⁵ Perry, Jr., 198.

⁷⁶ Perry, Jr., 62.

⁷⁷ Perry, Jr., 62.

⁷⁸ Perry, Jr., 62.

⁷⁹ Perry, Jr., 238.

Perry observed that for the majority of students in his research

the most important support seemed to derive from a special realization of community. This was the realization that in the very risks, separateness, and individuality of working out their Commitments, they were in the same boat not only with each other but with their instructors as well.⁸⁰

Thus, Perry urged educators to be open with their students about “their own thinking, groping, doubts, and styles of Commitment.”⁸¹ He advocated that educators push their students to take risks and courageously make their own Commitments.⁸² Perry also criticized the higher education community for failing to adapt to the new understanding of the nature of knowledge as contextual and relativistic. Finally, he praised the courage of undergraduate students and suggested that the educational community has a reciprocal responsibility “to recognize the student in his courage” and to affirm his growth.⁸³

Young Adulthood and the Construction of Meaning

Sharon Daloz Parks suggests that the key developmental task for young adults is “to experience the birth of critical awareness and the dissolution and recomposition of the meaning of self, other, world, and ‘God.’”⁸⁴ Thus, young adulthood is a time when we engage life’s big questions and encounter worthy dreams.⁸⁵ Parks emphasizes how important it is to both individual young adults and society that young people develop personal faith.

Parks uses the term faith much in the same way as Fowler. She describes faith as “*the activity of seeking and discovering meaning in the most comprehensive dimensions*

⁸⁰ Perry, Jr., 239.

⁸¹ Perry, Jr., 239.

⁸² Perry, Jr., 239.

⁸³ Perry, Jr., 241.

⁸⁴ Parks, 5.

⁸⁵ Parks, 5.

of our experience.”⁸⁶ Thus, Parks like Fowler understands faith as a human universal phenomenon that involves trust, hope and meaning and not a prescribed set of beliefs associated with a particular religion. She builds upon H. Richard Niebuhr’s metaphors of human faith to describe the dynamic process of constructing meaning and reiterates how important it is for each of us to possess a coherent system of meaning so that we may respond to painful times of crisis.⁸⁷

Parks examines Perry’s nine Positions of intellectual and moral development, Erikson’s and Kegan’s theories on identity and ego development, and Fowler’s faith development theory in light of her experience with undergraduate and graduate students. She contends that in her work with young people, she has identified “a distinctive mode of meaning-making” that takes place between the ages of seventeen and thirty.⁸⁸ She writes:

This mode of making meaning includes: (1) becoming critically aware of one’s own composing of reality, (2) self-consciously participating in an ongoing dialogue toward truth, and (3) cultivating a capacity to respond—to act—in ways that are satisfying and just.⁸⁹

She identifies this new, distinct stage as Young Adulthood which she then subdivides into two periods: young adult and tested adult. Thus, she uses a four phase scheme of adolescence, young adult, tested adult and mature adult.

Parks examines how young adults and tested adults mature in their understanding of knowledge (cognition), awareness of and respect for their own authority (feeling and affect), and their hopes and expectations for community. With regards to the nature of

⁸⁶ Parks, 7. Italics in the original.

⁸⁷ Parks, 28.

⁸⁸ Parks, 6.

⁸⁹ Parks, 6.

knowledge, Parks separates Perry's commitment in relativism into two eras: (1) the probing commitment of the young adult; and, (2) the tested commitment of the tested adult.⁹⁰ Probing commitment refers a young adult's exploration of "many possible forms of truth—as well as work roles, relationships, and lifestyles—and their fittingness to one's own experience of self and world."⁹¹ Parks emphasizes that the tentative searching or testing of commitment engaged by the young adult in this era "is qualitatively different from adolescent experimentation in search of self-definition."⁹² She writes:

The probing commitment of the postadolescent is a serious, critically aware exploration of the adult world and the potential versions of a future that it offers (which the adolescent, in contrast, receives uncritically), through which society's vulnerability, strength, integrity, and possibilities are assessed. A corresponding self-probing tests the strength, vulnerability, and capacity of the self to withstand or use what society will make, ask, and allow.⁹³

The tested adult possesses a more grounded sense of self because he or she has experimented with their form of knowing and being.⁹⁴ Thus, the tested adult has "a sense of fittingness, a recognition that one is willing to make one's peace and to affirm one's place in the scheme of things (though not uncritically)."⁹⁵

Parks traces the way in which young people learn to accept themselves as legitimate sources of authority and take responsibility for their own making of meaning. She agrees with Kegan's description of the adolescent era of development as "interpersonal" because the adolescent's sense of self and understanding of truth is dependent upon his or her relationships with others.⁹⁶ Likewise, she agrees with

⁹⁰ Parks, 69.

⁹¹ Parks, 67.

⁹² Parks, 67.

⁹³ Parks, 67-68.

⁹⁴ Parks, 69.

⁹⁵ Parks, 69.

⁹⁶ Parks, 74.

Fowler's label of conventional for this stage because young people accept without reservation "the conventions of group and societal norms."⁹⁷ She also observes that adolescents may display counterdependence or reject sources of authority or forms of meaning making.

Parks describes the young adult approach to dependence as fragile inner-dependent. She differentiates inner-dependence from independence by suggesting that inner-dependence refers to how a person is able to recognize the validity of external sources of authority even as he or she begins to recognize the validity of their own voice.⁹⁸ Thus, inner-dependence reflects a "new consciousness of the authority of the self in the composing of truth and choice."⁹⁹ Parks notes that

this awakening of the need to honor inner as well as outer demands while finding the right relationship to a wider and more complex world is manifest in today's parlance as a hunger for things "spiritual" in contrast to "religion."¹⁰⁰

Parks refers to the young adult's new sense of inner-dependence as fragile to suggest that this exploration process is both a time of possibility and vulnerability. As young people begin to question authority and listen to their own wisdom, they experience confusion, doubt and anxiety. It is important for caring adults and mentors to support young adults in this questioning.

Over time, as we support young people in this time of searching, tested adults will develop more confident inner-dependence.¹⁰¹ This means that the tested adult possesses

⁹⁷ Parks, 74.

⁹⁸ Parks, 77.

⁹⁹ Parks, 78.

¹⁰⁰ Parks, 79.

¹⁰¹ Parks, 84.

“a deepened capacity to order his or her own sense of value and promise.”¹⁰² She notes that this ability to trust one’s own voice and to critically reflect upon and learn from one’s own experience is crucial for the healthy ethical and spiritual development of young people. Parks notes that most people do not express full interdependence or exhibit a deep sense of inner trust as well as respect for the wisdom of others until they are much older.

Parks builds upon Kegan’s two fundamental yearnings of human existence as the yearning for autonomy and the yearning for belonging to consider how young adults develop community. She notes that adolescents focus on conforming to the norms of their circle of peers or family (conventional community) but that in time, they begin to question their place in this community as they deal with the uncertainty of unqualified relativism (diffuse community).

Young adults who are now testing out different commitments and beginning to listen to their own wisdom will seek out mentoring communities that foster their critical engagement in life’s big questions. Parks writes: “(a) mentoring community offers hospitality to the potential of the emerging self, and it offers access to worthy dreams of self and world.”¹⁰³ She emphasizes the importance of young adults finding a community of belonging in which “the emerging self can flourish with integrity.”¹⁰⁴ This time of deconstructing and recomposing meaning is one of great vulnerability in the young adult’s life and without supportive communities, many young adults flounder or struggle. Mentoring communities both support young people when they engage in deep

¹⁰² Parks, 84.

¹⁰³ Parks, 93.

¹⁰⁴ Parks, 94.

questioning and challenge them when they resist engaging these questions. Likewise, mentoring communities push young people to dream worthy dreams about their personal sense of purpose or vocation.

Tested adults who develop their own systems of meaning will seek to create a community of like-minded individuals (a self-selected class/group). Parks notes that while tested adults may expand their circle to reflect more diversity, in the end, the members of this new community will “hold similar political, religious, and philosophical views and values and share the loyalties of a particular economic class.”¹⁰⁵ Parks observes that it is not until we reach mature adulthood that we are able to honor and respect others for who they truly are but that it is essential that we learn this so that we may work together to serve the common good.

Parks is highly critical of higher education. She argues that colleges and universities must become mentoring communities. She builds upon Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s theory on imagination as the means by which humans compose meaning, interpret symbols, and connect with the Spirit to suggest that faculty and other caring adults must challenge young adults to develop “a strong, empathetic, moral imagination.”¹⁰⁶ She writes that today, it “is increasingly critical to the practice of citizenship and the vocation of a faithful adulthood in a world marked by social diversity and the awareness of suffering on a global scale” that young adults develop critically reflective systems of meaning.¹⁰⁷ She is adamant that the future health of both our young people and society rests in our ability to support young adults as they engage in the

¹⁰⁵ Parks, 100.

¹⁰⁶ Parks, 124.

¹⁰⁷ Parks, 124.

process of making meaning. She writes:

Never before in the human life cycle (and never again) is there the same developmental readiness for asking big questions and forming worthy dreams. In every generation, the renewal of human life is dependent in significant measure upon the questions that are posed to us during this era in our meaning-making. The dreams those questions seed yield the promise of our shared future.¹⁰⁸

Many chaplains, interfaith directors, faculty and administrators in higher education find Parks' work to be informative to their work on college campuses. She has done an excellent job of highlighting critical developmental issues many young adults experience at school and beyond. Her work has been instrumental to numerous colleges that have received funding from the Lilly Endowment through their Programs for the Theological Exploration of Vocation initiative. In particular, her call for colleges to become mentoring communities resonates.

Nevertheless, I will make two observations about her work. First, I would like Parks to focus more specifically on the particular developmental needs and concerns of students of color. As discussed later in this chapter, students of color must learn how to construct and affirm their identity as members of nondominant races or ethnicities on campuses and in a society in which racism is a reality. The way in which one effectively mentors a student of color experiencing implicit or explicit racism on campus is very different than how one mentors a student who is becoming aware of his or her privilege as a member of the dominant culture for the first time. Similarly, it is important to consider the unique concerns of students from different ethnic communities that may possess more communal and/or patriarchal values. And, while I find Parks' work to be helpful in my context at a small, elite liberal arts college, my sense is that there is an

¹⁰⁸ Parks, 103.

implicit sense of privilege underlying this work. To fully embrace her notion of a quest or journey to create meaning, students need the time and resources to engage in activities that will challenge them to think in new ways such as studying abroad, participating in internships or volunteer work in the community, or other extracurricular activities. Unfortunately, many of today's undergraduate students deal with financial pressures that may make engagement in these activities difficult if not impossible.

Emerging Adulthood

Jeffrey Jensen Arnett argues that “a new and historically unprecedented period of the life course” exists in the United States known as “emerging adulthood” or a period of time between adolescence and adulthood, roughly between the ages of 18 and 25.¹⁰⁹ He identifies three significant cultural changes that have created emerging adulthood: people are delaying marriage and parenthood, spending more time in higher education and experiencing longer periods of job instability in their twenties.¹¹⁰ Arnett notes that “(e)merging adulthood is not a universal period of human development.”¹¹¹ Rather, it is a period of time that only exists in particular cultures or contexts. This is because it is dependent upon one's ability to delay marriage and parenthood which is impacted by cultural expectations about marriage and parenting, socioeconomic factors and other life

¹⁰⁹ Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road From the Late Teens Through the Twenties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 4.

¹¹⁰ Arnett, 3-4. Arnett offers several reasons for why young people are delaying marriage and parenthood: (1) new social norms about the acceptability of premarital sex and the availability of birth control mean that young people are no longer waiting to get married before entering into sexual relationships; (2) the number of young people attending college has increased with more than two-thirds of young people attending college in the year following high school graduation; and, (3) women have more freedom and career options due to increased access to education and changing social expectations. See Arnett, 6-7.

¹¹¹ Arnett, 21.

circumstances.¹¹²

Emerging adulthood is marked by five characteristics. First, it is a time of intense identity exploration. Arnett contends that while Erikson was correct that young people begin identity exploration in adolescence, he argues that “most identity exploration takes place in emerging adulthood.”¹¹³ Second, emerging adulthood is a time of instability. Third, it is a time when individuals become more self-focused in an effort to become self-sufficient.¹¹⁴ Fourth, emerging adulthood is a time of transition. Arnett contends that there are three criteria most people in the United States use to determine if someone has moved into adulthood: self-responsibility, the ability to make one’s own decisions; and financial independence.¹¹⁵ Adulthood is achieved when individuals become independent from their parents in these three areas. Finally, emerging adulthood is a time of hope and possibility.

Arnett makes observations about emerging adulthood based on his research with young men and women and in light of other research. Arnett describes college as a time of identity exploration as young people seek to identify a meaningful career. He writes that “(c)ollege in the United States is for finding out what you want to do.”¹¹⁶ In fact, student satisfaction is often discussed in terms of how their college experiences are nurturing their personal growth. He concludes that “(i)n many ways, the American college is the emerging adult environment par excellence. It is expressly designed for the

¹¹² Arnett, 22.

¹¹³ Arnett, 9.

¹¹⁴ Arnett, 13-14.

¹¹⁵ Arnett, 15.

¹¹⁶ Arnett, 122.

independent explorations that are at the heart of emerging adulthood.”¹¹⁷ Further, despite the fact that college can be stressful and that many young people drop out, overall, college is a blessing for emerging adults. He writes:

College is a social island set off from the rest of society, a temporary safe haven where emerging adults can explore possibilities in love, work, and world views with many of the responsibilities of adult life minimized, postponed, kept at bay.¹¹⁸

Arnett describes how emerging adults consider their career as part of their identity development process. He writes: “(i)n the course of emerging adulthood, as they try out various jobs, they begin to answer their identity questions, that is, they develop a better sense of who they are and what work suits them best.”¹¹⁹ He notes that it takes emerging adults time to identify the right career and that “(t)he average American holds seven to eight different jobs between the ages of 18 and 30, and one in four young workers has more than 10 different jobs during this period.”¹²⁰ But he observes most emerging adults eventually find a satisfying job and most “remain hopeful that their identity quest will end in success and they will find a job that clicks with their perception of themselves.”¹²¹

Arnett describes how emerging adults approach religion as they develop their identity. He argues this is an important time as young people seek to develop a coherent ideology or worldview. Based on his research with emerging adults, he suggests that

religious beliefs are important to a slight majority of emerging adults, both in a general sense and as part of their daily lives, but nearly half of them regard their religious beliefs as only somewhat or not at all important.¹²²

¹¹⁷ Arnett, 140.

¹¹⁸ Arnett, 140.

¹¹⁹ Arnett, 146.

¹²⁰ Arnett, 146.

¹²¹ Arnett, 162.

¹²² Arnett, 167.

Overall, he found that 22 percent of emerging adults identify as agnostic or atheist, 28 percent believe in God or a “high power” or “spirituality” but outside the bounds of any religious tradition, 27 percent identify as a member of a religious tradition but possess a liberal perspective towards this tradition, and 23 percent identify as religious conservatives.¹²³ He also observes that many emerging adults construct their own systems of belief from different sources including religious and secular sources.¹²⁴ Likewise, many are highly suspicious of religious institutions.

Arnett argues that there is “little relationship” between the religious and spiritual beliefs of emerging adults with the religious tradition in which they were raised.¹²⁵ He suggests that part of the issue is that many emerging adults feel it is necessary to make their own decisions about religion. He writes:

For most emerging adults, simply to accept what their parents have taught them about religion and carry on the same religious tradition of their parents would represent a kind of failure, an abdication of their responsibility to think for themselves, become independent from their parents, and decide on their own beliefs.¹²⁶

Arnett suggests that emerging adults also self-select their values and that many express individualistic values such as an “individualistic pursuit of happiness.”¹²⁷ At the same time, many express a commitment to helping others. He concludes that while emerging adulthood is a time of transition, stress and uncertainty, most emerging adults are optimistic about their future. In fact, in a recent national survey, 96 percent of young adults between the ages of 18-24 agreed that they would get where they want to be in life

¹²³ Arnett, 167.

¹²⁴ Arnett, 171.

¹²⁵ Arnett, 174.

¹²⁶ Arnett, 177.

¹²⁷ Arnett, 181.

someday.¹²⁸

While I am intrigued with Arnett's description of emerging adulthood as a new life course, I have some concerns about his analysis. First, Arnett himself notes that emerging adulthood is not a universal human development experience but rather an experience influenced by culture and context including the young person's economic status and ethnicity. At the same time, he is skeptical of criticism that suggests that emerging adulthood is only for the privileged.¹²⁹ I disagree and question how Arnett defines privilege.

Arnett admits that young people from lower income homes or minority communities are less likely to have the opportunity to experience emerging adulthood. He writes:

Variations in socioeconomic status and life circumstances also determine the extent to which a given young person may experience emerging adulthood, even within a country that is affluent overall.¹³⁰

Isn't this in fact the definition of privilege?

Secondly, I think Arnett may not completely understand the reality of life for emerging adults from unhappy homes. He argues that for many young people raised in unhappy homes, emerging adulthood offers the possibility of escape as they move out to live on their own.¹³¹ He seems to think that young people can simply walk away from family concerns because they are no longer living at home. It has been my experience working with college students that this is simply not the case. Many young people are carrying the stress of their family life with them on to campus. Students are dealing with

¹²⁸ Arnett, 223.

¹²⁹ Arnett, 189-190.

¹³⁰ Arnett, 22.

¹³¹ Arnett, 189.

unemployed parents or family members struggling with addiction, suicide or divorce and this makes their college experience more much stressful.

In fact, Ricardo, one of the participants in this study, discussed some familial challenges during his interview. Ricardo is a 24-year-old Chicano young man from Northern California. Ricardo grew up in the middle of the inner city and was able to attend a private Catholic high school. During the fellowship under review in this research project, Ricardo worked with an organization that provides legal advice to children and youth to ensure that these young people receive their educational rights and opportunities. Ricardo discussed how working at this organization created a sense of inner turmoil or, to use his phrase, “vicarious trauma,” because some of the young people being served at this organization reminded him of himself. He talked about how working at the organization brought back painful memories of his uncles and father who had been in and out of jail. While Ricardo was able to attend a small, elite liberal arts college, the reality of the life of his family in his home city weighed heavily on him while he was at school.

In addition, first generation students or students from particular ethnic communities face enormous pressures from parents to stay deeply connected to the family. Students from these communities often face pressure to come home frequently through out the year.

I also find Arnett’s description of the religious life of emerging adults a bit simplistic. I have issues with the way in which Arnett characterizes the 28 percent of emerging adults who possess “general belief in God or a ‘higher power’ or ‘spirituality’”

which he calls “deists.”¹³² He suggests that while emerging adults do not use the term deist themselves, they do meet “the definition of a deist as someone who holds a general belief in God.”¹³³ I think Arnett oversimplifies his analysis. He shares the story of a young woman who describes herself as spiritual but not religious and includes this woman in the category of a deist. However, in my experience emerging adults who identify as spiritual but not religious may or may not have a belief in God. To identify and categorize all these young people as deists misses many of the complicated but important nuances of the spiritual lives of emerging adults. Further, his analysis is too Judeo-Christian focused.

As part of this research project, I asked fourteen young adults to identify their religious or spiritual background and if they identified with any particular religious tradition today. As I read the various descriptions on the pre-interview questionnaires, it became clear that it is simply not possible to clearly categorize or label the religious or spiritual identity of many of today’s young adults. Their religious or spiritual identities are often very complicated or nuanced. For example, Julia, a 25-year-old White woman, noted on her questionnaire that she was raised in an untraditional Catholic environment and that she was exposed to many different religions in her childhood. When asked to describe her current religious identity, Julia noted “(c)urrently, I do not consider myself religious, but still consider myself very spiritual, in a very Taoist way. I pray often, and sometimes meditate, but do not have an easily definable spiritual identity.” Similarly, Alexandra has what she calls a very eclectic spirituality. While she was baptized Russian Orthodox and confirmed in the Episcopalian Church, Alexandra now identifies her

¹³² Arnett, 169.

¹³³ Arnett, 169.

spirituality as influenced by different schools of thought within different forms of Yoga and the Native American Church.

Racial and Ethnic Identity Development

Identity formation for young adults of color is complicated by the reality of racism in American society. These young adults must learn to embrace their racial or ethnic identities in a society that has traditionally privileged White people. Janet Helms suggests that “(r)acial identity theory evolves out of a tradition of treating race as a sociopolitical, and, to a lesser extent, a cultural construction.”¹³⁴ These theories consider how Asian Americans, African Americans, Latino Americans and Native Americans have “adapted in an environment in which they were generally denied access to a fair share of societal resources, and in which innate racial inferiority was used as the justification for their maltreatment.”¹³⁵ Such theories consider how people of color can overcome internalized racism to develop a strong sense of racial pride and psychological well-being.

Theories on adolescent racial identity development are derived from adult racial identity development theories. William E. Cross, Jr. was one of the first researchers to offer an adult Nigrescence psychological model or a model based on “*the psychology of becoming black*.”¹³⁶ Joseph G. Ponterotto and Jennie Park-Taylor observe that Cross’

¹³⁴ Janet Helms, “An Update on Helms’s White and People of Color Racial Identity Models,” in *Handbook of Multicultural Counseling*, eds. Joseph G. Ponterotto, J. Manuel Casas, Lisa A. Suzuki, and Charles M. Alexander (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995), 181.

¹³⁵ Helms, 182.

¹³⁶ William E. Cross, Jr. “The Psychology of Nigrescence: Revising the Cross Model,” in *Handbook of Multicultural Counseling*, 94. Italics in the original. Cross developed his first model in the immediate aftermath of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements of the 1960’s. Cross’ first model, presented in 1971, was based on how Black adults come to terms with their racial identity. My summary reflects Cross’ theory as modified in 1991 and summarized in William E. Cross, Jr., “The Psychology of Nigrescence:

model serves as the “foundation for the subsequent development of at least 22 models of racial, biracial, multiracial, ethnic, feminist, and gay/lesbian identity.”¹³⁷

Cross contends that “*Nigrescence is a resocializing experience*” through which Black adults who have little or no sense of their racial identity develop an Afrocentric identity.¹³⁸ Cross’ original theory was based on five stages: (1) the Pre-encounter stage in which adults possess a pre-existing racial identity with high or low salience for race or internalized racism; (2) the Encounter stage which adults enter in response to an experience(s) that challenge their sense of racial identity; (3) the transitional stage of Immersion-Emersion in which adults engross themselves in their Blackness (immersion) and develop a more mature understanding of Blackness and Black pride (emersion); (4) the Internalization stage in which adults place high priority of being Black or internalize Black pride; and, (5) the Internalization-Commitment stage during which adults seek to advance Black causes and address racism.

In 2001, Cross and Peony Fhagen-Smith offered a life span model of Black identity development which presents a more sophisticated understanding of Cross’ Nigrescence theory.¹³⁹ They offer three different growth patterns: (1) Nigrescence

Revising the Cross Model,” in *Handbook of Multicultural Counseling*, 1995, 93-121.

¹³⁷ Joseph G. Ponterotto and Jennie Park-Taylor, “Racial and Ethnic Identity Theory, Measurement, and Research in Counseling Psychology: Present Status and Future Directions,” *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 54, no. 3 (2007): 283, <http://dx.doi.org/10.37/0022-0167.54.3.282>.

¹³⁸ Cross, Jr., “The Psychology of Nigrescence: Revising the Cross Model,” 97. Italics in the original. It is important to note that this model of racial identity development is based on the notion that Black adults need to undergo some sort of conversionary experience in terms of their sense of Blackness. However, Cross observed in 1995 that “it is possible for a Black person to be socialized from early childhood through adolescence to have a Black identity. At adulthood, such persons are not likely to be in need of Nigrescence” but may in fact recycle through these stages of development during the course of their lifetime. See William E. Cross, Jr., “The Psychology of Nigrescence: Revising the Cross Model,” in *Handbook of Multicultural Counseling*, 97-98.

¹³⁹ William E. Cross, Jr. and Peony Fhagen-Smith, “Patterns of African American Identity Development: A Life Span Perspective,” in *New Perspectives on Racial Identity Development: A Theoretical and Practical*

Pattern A which reflects the experiences of individuals who develop a Black identity as a result of socialization processes in childhood or adolescence; (2) Nigrescence Pattern B or the process of developing a Black identity as an adult as reflected in Cross' original five stage model; and, (3) Nigrescence Pattern C which refers to the continued growth that people in patterns A or B experience throughout their lives.¹⁴⁰ They suggest that the majority of Black Americans pursue Pattern A.¹⁴¹

Beverly Daniel Tatum applies Cross' theory on adult racial identity development to adolescents.¹⁴² Tatum suggests that Black children up to pre-adolescents are in the Pre-Encounter stage which means that they have not examined their racial identity. While pre-school children are aware that people have different skin colors, the notion that a person's racial group membership is permanent does not occur to them until they reach the age of six or seven. Children or adolescents will enter into the Encounter stage based on a first-hand encounter with racism. These young people will begin to question what it means to be Black. Tatum observes that Black youth may enter into this stage as early as junior high school. During the Encounter stage, Black youth begin to isolate themselves from their White peers in order to support one another in the face of racism.¹⁴³ Because

Anthology, eds. Charmaine L. Wijeyeshinghe and Bailey W. Jackson, III (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 243-270.

¹⁴⁰ Cross, Jr. and Fhagen-Smith, 243-244.

¹⁴¹ Cross, Jr. and Fhagen-Smith, 243. This lifecycle perspective divides the human life cycle into six sectors: (1) infancy and childhood; (2) preadolescence; (3) adolescence; (4) young adulthood; (5) adult Nigrescence; and, (6) Nigrescence recycling. Within each of these six sectors, they explore possible trajectories of development based on the saliency of race in the person's life (high, low, and internalized racism). When discussing adolescence, they integrate James E. Marcia's work on identity statuses. See Cross and Fhagen-Smith, "Patterns of African American Identity Development."

¹⁴² Beverly Daniel Tatum, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?: and Other Conversations About Race* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 54-59.

¹⁴³ Tatum found that some Black students may develop an oppositional identity. This means that Black teenagers will define certain attitudes, behaviors and characteristics as belonging to White people and reject them in favor of others that they define as Black. Black peers play an important role in this process because they criticize students who they perceive as "acting White" and pressure them to adopt Black

Black students begin to deal with racial identity before White students, they often feel that they cannot talk to White students about racism. Black students may also experience racism from White students who consciously or unconsciously perpetuate racial stereotypes.

Tatum suggests that students move into the Immersion/Emersion stage in late adolescence or young adulthood. At this point in her theory, Tatum returns to Cross' adult development theory to suggest that the Immersion/Emersion stage is characterized by Black young adults exploring their Blackness while distancing themselves from White culture. A Black young adult is "unlearning the internalized stereotypes about his or her own group and is redefining a positive sense of self, based on an affirmation of one's racial identity."¹⁴⁴ From here, young adults move into the Internalization stage as they develop a positive racial identity and the Internalization-Commitment stage as they respond to racism.

Jean S. Phinney offers a three stage ethnic identity development model based upon Erikson's theory of psychosocial development and James E. Marcia's work on identity statuses and development.¹⁴⁵ Phinney's theory focuses on "the way in which individuals

behaviors, values and attitudes. This includes ostracizing students who seek to do well in school. Tatum's research with academically successful Black students found that some students who desired to do well in school often felt alienated from their Black peers and distanced themselves from their Black identity in order to be accepted by their White peers. Tatum, 82-85.

¹⁴⁴ Tatum, 76.

¹⁴⁵ Jean S. Phinney, "Stages of Ethnic Identity Development in Minority Group Adolescents," *Journal of Early Adolescence* 9, no. 1-2 (1989): 34-49, accessed April 28, 2008, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0272431689091004>. James E. Marcia developed a model of identity development among adolescents in which he identified four statuses of identity development: (1) identity achievement; (2) foreclosure; (3) identity diffusion; and, (4) moratorium. For more information, see James E. Marcia, "Identity in Adolescence," in *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology*, ed. J. Adelson (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1980), 159-187. Phinney, consistent with Marcia's ego status theory, initially proposed a four stage ethnic identity theory: (1) diffused ethnic identity; (2) foreclosed; (3) moratorium; and, (4) achieved. However, after conducting this study with 91 Asian American, Black, Hispanic and

come to understand the implications of their ethnicity and make decisions about its role in their lives” rather than “the actual ethnic behaviors that individuals practice” or “their attitudes toward their ethnic group.”¹⁴⁶ Phinney’s first stage is *unexamined ethnic identity* during which youth have not begun to explore their ethnic identity. As students seek information about their ethnicity, they move into the second stage called *ethnic identity search/moratorium*. The third stage is *ethnic identity achievement* and people in this stage possess a sense of ethnic pride. Phinney suggests that youth can begin this identity exploration process as early as eighth grade.¹⁴⁷ At the same time, she notes that ethnic identity development continues into young adulthood.¹⁴⁸ In fact, Phinney and Linda Line Alipuria found that college students of color rate ethnic identity as more important than their political identity and above or close to importance of their religious identities.¹⁴⁹

White tenth-graders, the research team could not identify four distinct stages and identity diffusion and foreclosure were combined under the new title of unexamined ethnic identity.

¹⁴⁶ Jean S. Phinney, “A Three Stage Model of Ethnic Identity Development in Adolescence,” in *Ethnic Identity: Formation and Transmission Among Hispanics and Other Minorities*, eds. Martha E. Bernal and George P. Knight (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 64.

¹⁴⁷ In a 1988 study of the Black and White eighth grade students at an integrated junior high school, Phinney and Steve Tarver found that over one-third of the students had engaged in an ethnic identity search and that for many of these students “ethnicity was an important issue with which they were beginning to deal.” Jean S. Phinney and Steve Tarver “Ethnic Identity Search and Commitment in Black and White Eighth Graders,” *Journal of Early Adolescence* 8, no. 3 (1988): 274, accessed October 17, 2011, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0272431688083004>. Similarly, Phinney’s 1989 study with 91 Asian American, Black, Hispanic and White tenth-grade students indicated that while 56 percent of the students from the three ethnic minority groups had not yet engaged in ethnic identity exploration, 23 percent were in the process of exploring their ethnic identity and 21 percent had attained an achieved ethnic identity. Jean S. Phinney, “Stages of Ethnic Identity Development in Minority Group Adolescents,” *Journal of Early Adolescence* 9, no. 1-2 (1989): 43, accessed April 28, 2008, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0272431689091004>.

¹⁴⁸ Jean S. Phinney, “Ethnic Identity Exploration in Emerging Adulthood,” in *Adolescent Identities: A Collection of Readings*, ed. Deborah L. Browning (New York: Analytic Press, 2008), 52;54. Phinney makes an important observation when she notes that most ethnic identity development research with young adults has been done with students attending large research universities and that there has been very little research on ethnic identity development among young adults who do not go to college. See 52-56.

¹⁴⁹ Phinney and Alipuria conducted a study on ethnic identity search and commitment with 196 Asian American, African American and Mexican American college students and a comparison White group in 1990. See Jean S. Phinney and Linda Line Alipuria, “Ethnic Identity in College Students from Four Ethnic Groups,” *Journal of Adolescence* 13 (1990): 171-183.

Sue and Sue discuss the unique challenges of ethnic identity development for Asian American young adults. They focus on how the values possessed by Asian Americans may present particular developmental challenges to young adults.¹⁵⁰ First, they note that Asian Americans are more likely to possess a collectivistic orientation which places priority on the needs of the family and community over the individual. Second, Asian Americans tend to maintain hierarchical relationships in which parents serve as strong authority figures who expect strict obedience from their children. Parents will place such great pressure on their children to do well academically that many young people develop anxiety or depression. Asian American parents are also more likely to pressure their college aged children to pursue particular vocational paths. Finally, despite the popular myth of Asian Americans as the model minority, many experience racism and other social problems including unemployment and poverty.

Bob H. Suzuki argues that there were two different and competing stereotypes that have the potential to cause significant psychological harm to Asian American college students: the myth of the model minority and the stereotype of the perfidious foreigner.¹⁵¹ Suzuki suggests that because many college faculty and administrators believe the myth that Asian American students are “problem free high achievers,” the needs of Asian American students are likely to go unaddressed in college.¹⁵² He notes that many Asian American students deal with high levels of psychological stress and alienation as unrealistic academic expectations are placed upon them by their teachers

¹⁵⁰ Derald Wing Sue and David Sue. *Counseling the Culturally Diverse: Theory and Practice*. 5th ed. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2008), 359-373.

¹⁵¹ Bob H. Suzuki, “Revisiting the Model Minority Stereotype: Implications for Student Affairs Practice and Higher Education,” *New Directions for Student Services*, no. 97 (Spring 2002): 28. Accessed March 30, 2013, <http://doi://dx.doi.org/10.1002/ss.36>.

¹⁵² Suzuki, 28.

and parents and that many students end up dropping out of school. At the same time, Asian American college students are often stereotyped as untrustworthy and experience racial harassment making their college experience even more challenging.

Native American ethnic identity development is also complex.¹⁵³ Three important factors need to be taken into consideration. First, we must recognize vast tribal diversity. As Amy Klemm Verbos, Joe S. Gladstone and Deana M. Kennedy observe: “Today the words *indigenous*, *American Indian*, and *Native American* conflate more than 500 unique and diverse groups of people across the United States.”¹⁵⁴ Second, Native American tribes are legally recognized as sovereign political entities or nations and thus, tribes possess the legal authority to determine who is a member of their tribe and who is not. And, third, we must acknowledge the impact of federal government policies designed to force Native Americans to assimilate into mainstream American society.¹⁵⁵

Perry G. Horse, an enrolled member of the Kiowa Native American tribe and a higher education consultant, suggests that “American Indian or tribal identity is a

¹⁵³ Perry G. Horse, “Native American Identity,” *New Directions for Student Services* 109 (Spring 2005): 66. Horse suggests that the terms Native American and American Indian are used interchangeably by Native Americans based on personal preference. He further observes that people born before 1950 are more comfortable being identified as American Indian while those born later refer to the term Native American. I use the terms interchangeably based on his observations.

¹⁵⁴ Amy Klem Verbos, Joe S. Gladstone, and Deanna Kennedy, “Native American Values and Management Education: Envisioning an Inclusive Virtuous Circle,” *Journal of Management Education* 35, no. 1 (February 2011): 10-26, accessed October 18, 2011, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1052562910384364>. Italics in the original.

¹⁵⁵ Sue and Sue highlight two governmental policies that undermined the ability of Native American families and tribes to teach their children cultural values and to transmit a sense of Indian identity. The first was the practice of forcing Native American children to attend boarding schools in which they were forced to speak English rather than their tribal languages, denied access to their tribal customs and required to be away from their homes for up to eight years. The second was the forced removal of Native American children from their own homes and relocation into non-tribal families prior to the adoption of the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978. Chief Calvin Isaac of the Mississippi Band of the Choctaw Indians testified before Congress in 1997 that at one point it was estimated that over 90 percent of American Indian children were being placed in non-Indian homes due to state policies. Calvin Isaac, speaking for the Indian Child Welfare Act Amendments of 1997, *Congressional Record* 1997 as quoted in Sue and Sue, *Counseling the Culturally Diverse: Theory and Practice*, 346-347.

personalized process that is influenced by legal and political considerations, psychosocial factors, proximity or access to a given culture, socialization, and one's own sensibility."¹⁵⁶ Identity development for Native Americans starts with one's immediate family and moves outward to one's extended family, to one's tribal affiliation and then to identification with the American Indian population more generally.¹⁵⁷ For individual American Indians, two important factors include one's self-identity as an American Indian and tribal recognition of this identity through the presentation of a traditional Indian name.¹⁵⁸ Horse concludes by suggesting that "the crux of Indian identity today" lies in the ability of American Indian tribes to preserve their culture and to maintain personal and communal hope in the midst of "the White man's world."¹⁵⁹

Discussing models of ethnic or racial identity development among Latino/a young adults is equally complicated.¹⁶⁰ One reason is because it is difficult to characterize the nature of this identity. Bernardo M. Ferdman and Plácida I. Gallegos observe that Latinos are an extremely heterogeneous group representing people from numerous nations of origin.¹⁶¹ While some individuals may identify themselves as White, others identify as neither Black nor White but as Latino and others have a racial identity forced upon them by White and Black Americans.

Vasti Torres has conducted numerous studies to develop a deeper understanding

¹⁵⁶ Horse, "Native American Identity," 67.

¹⁵⁷ Perry G. Horse, "Reflections on American Indian Identity," in *New Perspectives on Racial Identity Development: A Theoretical and Practical Anthology*, 94.

¹⁵⁸ Horse, "Reflections on American Indian Identity," 94.

¹⁵⁹ Horse, "Reflections on American Indian Identity," 104.

¹⁶⁰ I use the term Latino rather than Hispanic to refer to individuals within this ethnic or racial group based on how other authors have used the term. However, as the discussion will demonstrate, there is not universal agreement about what the terms Latino or Hispanic refer to or which term is preferable.

¹⁶¹ Bernardo M. Ferdman and Plácida I. Gallegos, "Racial Identity Development and Latinos in the United States," in *New Perspectives on Racial Identity Development: A Theoretical and Practical Anthology*, 32-66.

of ethnic identity development among college students. In 2003, Torres explored ethnic identity development in ten Latino/a college students during their first two years in college.¹⁶² Torres identifies two important categories: (1) situating identity or how the students understood their identity during their first year in school, and (2) influences on change in identity development. Torres identified three factors that influence the students' situating identity which include the environment in which they grew up, the family's length of time in the United States and the students' perception of self in relation to society. Students raised in diverse communities have a strong sense of ethnic identity while students who grew up in all Latino neighborhoods do not identify themselves as a minority until entering college. Students who grew up in White European neighborhoods tend to identify by the home geographical region, associate with the dominant culture and struggle with campus diversity.

Torres discovered that first generation students experience a sense of alienation with mainstream culture but also struggle with parental expectations due to their traditional ethnic values. In terms of self-perception, students who felt that they had social privilege acknowledged the reality of racial stereotypes but did not see that these stereotypes applied to them while students who felt no or little sense of privilege recognized the reality of racism around them. Torres identified two key factors that impacted the way in which students changed their sense of ethnic identity: cultural dissonance and changes in relationships.

In 2004, Torres and Marcia Baxter Magolda investigated the relationship between

¹⁶² Vasti Torres, "Influences on Ethnic Identity Development of Latino College Students in the First Two Years of College," *Journal of College Student Development* 44, no. 4 (July/August 2003): 532-547, accessed October 12, 2011, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/csd.2003.0044>.

cognitive and ethnic identity development with 28 college students over a two-year period.¹⁶³ The researchers conclude that “cognitive dissonance and the construction of more complex ways of thinking was key to decreasing susceptibility to stereotype vulnerability and creating positive images of their ethnicity.”¹⁶⁴ Torres and Magolda further suggest that cognitive development promotes intrapersonal and interpersonal development and that “ethnic identity reconstruction was intricately interwoven with cognitive and relationship reconstruction.”¹⁶⁵

Among the fourteen young adults included in this current study, four students identified as a student of color or as multiracial. Ricardo identifies as Chicano while Stephanie, a 23-year-old, identifies as Hispanic. The two multiracial students include Yvonne, who is Afro-Caribbean and Irish, and Nancy, who is Nepali (Sherpa) and Jewish American. During the interviews conducted for this study, it was clear that several of these young people were still working through issues around their racial identity. For example, Ricardo described how his experience in the fellowship under review in this research project helped him realize that many of the social issues facing the Chicano community in his home city such as the high rates of incarceration for young adults and the lack of access to good education were not isolated issues that pertained only to his home town. Rather, they were larger, systemic issues related to life for Chicanos and Latinos more generally. He also realized that his vocational ambitions include working with the larger Latino community to transform these social problems.

¹⁶³ Vasti Torres and Marcia Baxter Magolda, “Reconstructing Latino Identity: The Influence of Cognitive Development on the Ethnic Identity Process of Latino Students,” *Journal of College Student Development* 45, no. 3 (May/June 2004): 333-347, accessed October 12, 2011, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/csd.2004.0043>.

¹⁶⁴ Torres and Magolda, 345.

¹⁶⁵ Torres and Magolda, 345.

Yvonne also discussed in a somewhat roundabout way her own struggle to come to terms with her racial identity and her work to advance acceptance of diversity on campus. Yvonne noted during her interview that she did not grow up in a diverse environment and that she believes this really affected her a lot. This included her ability to make lasting friendships. She observed that while her sister “could pass,” she was “just seen as a Black girl that lives in the suburbs.” She believes this, combined with her natural shyness, made it hard for her to make friends. While at college, Yvonne built a supportive community of friends through her work at an Intercultural Center and by living in a multicultural hall on campus. And yet, even with this supportive community, Yvonne struggled with the academic and social pressures of college. Now, as a young adult living in a new city, Yvonne is continuing to push herself to meet new people in order to develop supportive relationships.

Reflections

It is important that undergraduate institutions foster student identity development as part of their mission to address the holistic developmental concerns of their students and commitment to educating future leaders and citizens dedicated to serving the common good. It is also important for academic institutions to provide a web of support for students of color like Ricardo and Yvonne who are engaged in the task of racial or ethnic identity development while surrounded by students from the dominant culture. Religious Life offices play an important role this process. These offices can offer support groups for students of color to talk about their religious and spiritual questions. Likewise, these offices can provide regular opportunities for students to engage in

contemplative discernment practices or to ask the difficult questions that accompany identity development formation. Another approach is to offer alternative spring break trips retreats, or civic engagement opportunities with guided reflection focused on identity development, diversity and pluralism. College chaplains can also provide spiritual direction and counseling to students.

CHAPTER 2

RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

Introduction

The general consensus regarding the intersection of religion and higher education in the United States in the early 1990's was the success of the secularization of the academy. While there are a variety of ways in which scholars reached this conclusion, most agreed that higher education had become separated from its religious roots and no longer addressed religious concerns on campus. Other scholars focused on how larger social changes in the way Americans approach religion and spirituality led young adults to arrive on campus with little interest in religion.

In fact, a variety of social, cultural and economic changes influenced the secularization of the academy. Liesa Stamm traces the historic roots of Christianity in higher education in the early colonies and the United States.¹⁶⁶ She observes that the first American colleges were founded by Christian denominations and that Christian theology and values influenced the character of scholarship and education in this country until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While this change took some time, Stamm highlights several significant factors that impacted the role of religion in higher education. The development of large, public land grant universities through the Morrill Act was a big step. These emerging institutions were established to provide practical

¹⁶⁶ Liesa Stamm, "The Influence of Religion and Spirituality in Shaping American Higher Education," in *Encouraging Authenticity and Spirituality in Higher Education*, eds. Arthur W. Chickering, Jon C. Dalton, and Liesa Stamm (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 66-91.

education in the areas of agriculture and mechanical arts.¹⁶⁷

Stamm highlights other changes. One such change took place after World War I with the birth of the modern American research university that prioritized academic research and disciplinary specialization over moral and character development.¹⁶⁸ Higher education continued to take a more pragmatic focus after World War II as colleges and universities began to concentrate on raising money through research for emerging industries and to prepare young adults for new technological jobs. With the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act and the subsequent increase in the number of students of color attending college, higher education began to focus on promoting awareness of and respect for diversity. With the Immigration Act of 1965, this focus on diversity expanded to include religious pluralism.

Other cultural changes led undergraduate students to become increasingly less interested in religion. One of these changes was the privatization of religion. Stamm agrees with Robert Wuthnow who suggests that due to different sociological changes, Americans are developing unique forms of spirituality by combining elements from a variety of religious traditions.¹⁶⁹ As a result, Wuthnow notes: “Now, at the end of the twentieth century, growing numbers of Americans piece together their faith like a patchwork quilt. Spirituality has become a vastly complex quest in which each person seeks in his or her own way.”¹⁷⁰ The growing religious pluralism in the United States after the 1965 immigration legislation created opportunities for Americans to explore

¹⁶⁷ Library of Congress, “Primary Documents in American History The Morrill Act,” last modified July 30, 2010, accessed September 29, 2012, <http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/Morrill.html>.

¹⁶⁸ Stamm, “The Influence of Religion and Spirituality,” 77.

¹⁶⁹ Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 2.

¹⁷⁰ Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, 2.

new religious traditions. Thus, Americans became more concerned about developing individual approaches to religious and spiritual beliefs and practice.

However, as Christian Smith with Patricia Snell observe, research on the religiosity of American college students in the 1990's began to raise questions about whether secularization was still the correct way to characterize religion in higher education.¹⁷¹ This research suggests that college no longer seems to negatively influence the religiosity of American college students. During this same time period, higher education professionals began to advocate for higher education institutions to support the spiritual lives of college students as part of their mission to support the holistic growth of their students.

One leading voice in this discussion was Jon C. Dalton, a former Vice President for the National Association of Student Affairs Professionals (NASPA), who founded the Institute on College Values at Florida State University in 1990. In 2006, Dalton co-authored *Encouraging Authenticity and Spirituality in Higher Education* with two distinguished higher education professionals, Arthur W. Chickering and Liesa Stamm. The authors invite higher education administrators to engage in serious conversations about how colleges and universities can help students and higher education personnel “address the lifelong, recurrent challenges” to “authenticity and spiritual growth.”¹⁷²

In this chapter, I examine the state of the research on college students and religion. I begin by highlighting research which indicates that today's undergraduate students are interested in spirituality. This is followed by a review of several studies

¹⁷¹ Christian Smith, with Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 249-250.

¹⁷² Arthur W. Chickering, Jon C. Dalton, and Liesa Stamm, “Preface,” in *Encouraging Authenticity and Spirituality in Higher Education*, xvi.

which suggest that while students are not as interested in spirituality as some would have us believe, higher education no longer seems to diminish their religiosity. I conclude by sharing thoughts about the implications of this research as we consider how to foster the healthy intellectual, ethical and religious and spiritual development of young adults.

Recent Research on Religion and Higher Education

In 2011, researchers at the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California, Los Angeles published the results of a longitudinal study on how college students approach religion and spirituality.¹⁷³ The twofold objectives of this study were “to document how students change spiritually and religiously during the college years, and to identify ways in which colleges can contribute in a positive way to this developmental process.”¹⁷⁴ Lead researchers Alexander W. Astin and Helen S. Astin describe their interest in this research because they believe that “*spirituality and religion are fundamental to students’ lives*” and that colleges and universities need to foster student engagement in life’s “big questions” regarding personal identity and purpose in order to help them to become responsible adults.¹⁷⁵ Based on the data collected over in this longitudinal study, Astin and Astin argue that “*higher education should attend to students’ spiritual development.*”¹⁷⁶

In 2003, the HERI research team conducted a pilot survey of 3,700 undergraduate students at all types of institutions to develop a set of measures to assess students’

¹⁷³ Alexander W. Astin, Helen S. Astin, and Jennifer Lindholm, *Cultivating the Spirit: How College Can Enhance Students’ Inner Lives* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011).

¹⁷⁴ Alexander W. Astin and Helen S. Astin, “How Liberal Education Can Enhance Students’ Spiritual Life,” in “The Liberal Education of Students of Faith,” Special Issue, *Liberal Arts: Journal of the Gaede Institute* 8 (2011): 20.

¹⁷⁵ Astin and Astin, “Liberal Education,” 17-18. Italics in the original.

¹⁷⁶ Astin and Astin, “Liberal Education,” 28-29. Italics in the original.

spiritual and religious qualities.¹⁷⁷ In fall 2004, they surveyed 112,232 incoming first year students at 236 institutions; in spring 2007, they interviewed 14,527 juniors from 136 institutions included in the 2004 survey.¹⁷⁸ This enabled the researchers to examine how students' religious and spiritual beliefs and practices changed over time. They also conducted student and faculty interviews, student focus groups and a faculty survey.¹⁷⁹

The researchers described spirituality as referring to a person's interior, subjective life as well as one's affective experiences.¹⁸⁰ They write:

More specifically, spirituality has to do with the values that we hold most dear, our sense of who we are, and where we come from, our beliefs about why we are here—the meaning and purpose that we see in our work and our life—and our sense of connectedness to one another and to the world around us. Spirituality can also bear on aspects of our experience that are not easy to define or talk about, such as intuition, inspiration, the mysterious, and the mythical. Finally, we believe that highly “spiritual” people tend to exemplify certain personal qualities such as love, compassion, and equanimity.¹⁸¹

The research team developed five measures of a person's spirituality.

1. *Spiritual Quest*: This measures the level of interest a student possesses for contemplating questions about meaning and developing a coherent life philosophy.
2. *Equanimity*: This is an indicator of a student's inner peace or centeredness.
3. *Ethic of Caring*: This measures the degree to which a student may care about helping others and desires to effectuate positive social change.
4. *Charitable Involvement*: This is a measure of how much time and money a student may donate to charity.
5. *Ecumenical Worldview*: This assesses the extent to which a student expresses a commitment to mutuality, respect and engagement with people of diverse cultures, ethnicities and religious traditions.¹⁸²

The researchers defined “religiousness” as a person's “devotion to, and practice

¹⁷⁷ Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, 9.

¹⁷⁸ Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, 19.

¹⁷⁹ Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, 9-10.

¹⁸⁰ Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, 4.

¹⁸¹ Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, 4.

¹⁸² Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, 20-21.

of, some kind of faith tradition” that “typically involves membership in a community of fellow believers and participation in the rituals of the faith.”¹⁸³ They used three measures of religiosity:

1. *Religious Commitment*: This is a measure of a student’s perceived level of “religiousness” and the role religion plays in the student’s daily life.
2. *Religious Engagement*: This is an assessment of how often a student may engage in religious practices such as worship, prayer and study.
3. *Religious/Social Conservatism*: This is a measure to assess the level of conservatism of a student’s religious beliefs.¹⁸⁴

In addition, the HERI researchers created measures to assess the extent to which a student may express skepticism about their religious beliefs and struggle with their religion.¹⁸⁵

Overall, the researchers conclude that

most students are searching for deeper meaning in their lives, looking for ways to cultivate their inner selves, seeking to be compassionate and charitable, and clarifying how they feel about the many issues confronting their society and the global community.¹⁸⁶

Specifically, the HERI data indicates that: four out of five college students are interested in spirituality and “believe in the sacredness of life;” close to two out of three students believe that their “spirituality is a source of joy,” and, more than two out of three students report receiving “strength, support and guidance” from their religious or spiritual beliefs.¹⁸⁷

In fact, incoming freshman students identify spiritual concerns as central to their college experience: “(m)ore than eight in ten report that ‘to find my purpose in life’ is at

¹⁸³ Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, 83.

¹⁸⁴ Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, 21-22.

¹⁸⁵ Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, 21-22.

¹⁸⁶ Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, 3-4.

¹⁸⁷ Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, 3.

least a ‘somewhat’ important reason for attending college.”¹⁸⁸ Two out of three first year students “say that it is either ‘very important’ or ‘essential’ that college” helps a person develop his or her values and deepen their self-understanding.¹⁸⁹

Student concern about spirituality increases in college. Approximately 50 percent of the students surveyed at the end of their junior year “rate ‘integrating spirituality in my life’ as a ‘very important’ or ‘essential’ life goal” compared to 42 percent of the students surveyed in their first year of college.¹⁹⁰ Fifty five percent of juniors rate “developing a meaningful philosophy of life” as “very important” or “essential” compared to 41 percent of first years.¹⁹¹

While student interest in spirituality increases in college, “*students’ level of Religious Commitment changes very little during college.*”¹⁹² Students did not significantly change their opinions about the role of religion in their lives between their freshmen and junior years.¹⁹³ However, student engagement in religion does decline during college as students are less likely to attend religious services and slightly less likely to engage in religious practices.¹⁹⁴ Students also struggle with religious questions and their likelihood to struggle with these questions increases over time. For example, 61 percent of juniors report questioning their religious/spiritual beliefs compared to 56

¹⁸⁸ Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, 3.

¹⁸⁹ Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, 3.

¹⁹⁰ Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, 31.

¹⁹¹ Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, 31-32.

¹⁹² Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, 85. Italics in the original.

¹⁹³ Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, 84-85.

¹⁹⁴ Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, 89. While 54 percent of the students said that they attend religious services about as frequently as they did in high school, 39 percent attend less often and only seven percent attend more often.

percent of first year students.¹⁹⁵ And, today's students are accepting of people of different religious or spiritual beliefs. Nine of out of ten college juniors agree with the statement that "non-religious people can lead lives that are just as moral as those of religious believers."¹⁹⁶

The HERI researchers examined the intersection of spirituality and traditional indicators of student academic success. They conclude that "*spiritual growth enhances other college outcomes*, such as academic performance, psychological well-being, leadership development, and satisfaction with college."¹⁹⁷ For example, a student's growth in their measure of Equanimity enhances his or her grade point average and "leadership skills, psychological well-being, self-rated ability to get along with other races and cultures, and satisfaction with college."¹⁹⁸ The researchers combined the measures of Ethic of Caring and Ecumenical Worldview into Global Citizenship which reflects a student's commitment to helping others and reducing suffering and his or her sense of connection to the global community.¹⁹⁹ The results suggest that a commitment to Global Citizenship "enhances students' interest in postgraduate study, self-rated ability to get along with other races and cultures, and commitment to promoting racial understanding."²⁰⁰

While the students I meet in my work on campus appear to possess many of the attributes indicated in the HERI study, there are several issues with this study that should

¹⁹⁵ Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, 103. Seventeen percent of juniors describe "'feeling unsettled about spiritual and religious matters'" compared to 14 percent of first year students while 10 percent of the juniors experience disillusionment with their religious upbringing compared to seven percent of first year students.

¹⁹⁶ Astin and Astin, "Liberal Education," 18.

¹⁹⁷ Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, 10. Italics in the original.

¹⁹⁸ Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, 135.

¹⁹⁹ Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, 143.

²⁰⁰ Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, 135.

be highlighted. First, the researchers developed religiosity measures that indicate a Judeo-Christian bias. For example, to assess the level of religious engagement among students, the team focused on practices such as attending formal religious services or engaging in prayer. To assess the conservative nature of students' religious beliefs, the team used indicators such as one's approaches to prayer as expressions of forgiveness and the nature of God as Father.²⁰¹ However, these particular practices and beliefs are not relevant to all religious traditions.

Secondly, it is unclear to me why the team decided to focus on the level of conservatism associated with students' religious beliefs. In what way is knowing this information useful? Are there underlying assumptions that suggest that students with conservative religious beliefs somehow lack certain characteristics that college graduates should possess?

Further, while it is helpful to know that undergraduate students are struggling with questions about their religious and spiritual beliefs, this really should come as no surprise to us. As William G. Perry, Jr. and Sharon Daloz Parks suggest, a primary developmental task of young adulthood is for individuals to develop personal systems of belief by questioning inherited commitments and developing new understandings based on one's own authority and experience. Thus, the religious skepticism and struggling that the HERI team highlights is an indication that young adults are really doing what they are supposed to do. The real question is how are colleges and universities helping students deal with their questions in critically reflective, healthy and constructive ways.

Samuel Speers, the Director for the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life at

²⁰¹ Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, 84.

Vassar College, offers another point of caution. He asks if the definition of spirituality used in this study is too broad or if “the boundaries of the ‘spiritual’” are becoming too blurry.²⁰² Speers notes that Wuthnow argues “that there is no such thing as ‘generic spirituality,’ understood apart from particular traditions from which different spiritual insights are drawn.”²⁰³ Speers suggests that the HERI study results reflect the privatization of religious preference, not an increase in interest among students in spirituality.

This HERI study confirms findings of several older studies on spirituality in higher education. As noted above, in 2006 Chickering, Dalton and Stamm published *Encouraging Authenticity and Spirituality in Higher Education* in which they advocate that higher education take the spiritual growth of college students seriously. The authors suggest that religion and spirituality are two separate phenomena.

The authors use William Teasdale’s definition of spirituality. Teasdale writes that “‘(b)eing spiritual suggests a personal commitment to a process of inner development that engages us in our totality.’”²⁰⁴

²⁰² Samuel Speers, “The Secular Thesis Revisited: Religious Life on the Secular College Campus Today,” *Journal of College and Character* 10, no. 1 (2008): 8.

²⁰³ Robert Wuthnow, Teagle Foundation “Listening on Religious Work,” September 9-10, 2005, Little Switzerland, N.C. quoted in Speers, “The Secular Thesis Revisited,” 8.

²⁰⁴ W. Teasdale, *The Mystic Heart* (Novato: New World Library, 1999), 17-18 quoted in Arthur W. Chickering, “Our Orientation,” in *Encouraging Authenticity and Spirituality*, 7.

Teasdale further notes:

“Being religious connotes belonging to and practicing a religious tradition. Being spiritual suggests a personal commitment to a process of inner development that engages us in our totality. Religion, of course, is one way many people are spiritual. Often, when authentic faith embodies an individual’s spirituality the religious and the spiritual will coincide. Still, not every religious person is spiritual (although they ought to be) and not every spiritual person is religious. Spirituality is a way of life that affects and includes every moment of existence. It is at once a contemplative attitude, a disposition to a life of depth, and the search for ultimate meaning, direction, and belonging. The spiritual person is committed to growth as an essential ongoing life goal. To be spiritual requires us to stand on our own two feet while being nurtured and supported by our tradition, if we are fortunate enough to have one.”²⁰⁵

In 2002, Stamm conducted a study on how college students approach religion and their participation in religious or spiritual activities on college campuses.²⁰⁶ Stamm interviewed chaplains, religious life deans and staff from national organizations involved in campus ministry as part of a larger study funded by the Templeton Foundation. Stamm draws three conclusions from her research. First, today’s college students can be defined as “spiritual seekers” who are eager to learn about spirituality but reject religion which they perceive to be too traditional, rigidly rule bound and irrelevant to their daily lives.²⁰⁷ Second, while many students appear to be interested in religions other than their own, some students are struggling with religious pluralism. She quotes one interviewee who made the following observation:

The college campus provides a pool of worldviews that leave many students actively searching for some absolute truth. This generation of students has been raised in a society where situational ethics and relative morality have softened the spiritual foundation that was secure for past generations.²⁰⁸

Third, many students describe their commitment to social justice and community service

²⁰⁵ W. Teasdale, 17-18 quoted in Chickering, “Our Orientation,” 7.

²⁰⁶ Stamm, “The Influence of Religion and Spirituality,” 66-92.

²⁰⁷ Stamm, “The Influence of Religion and Spirituality,” 86.

²⁰⁸ Stamm, “The Influence of Religion and Spirituality,” 87.

as an expression of their spirituality.²⁰⁹

Stamm concludes that students' views about religion mirror the predominant individualistic approach to religion in contemporary American society. She writes:

Students are actively engaged in piercing together their own spiritual homes from the diverse array of world religious practices and beliefs and from other spiritual sources, such as inspirational literature, films, workshops, conferences, retreats and self-help groups. They are less interested in, and often distrust, organized religion, finding spiritual growth through their personal quests for meaning and purpose in their lives.²¹⁰

In this same book, Dalton shares the results of a study he conducted during the summer of 2003.²¹¹ Dalton sent the "Survey on Trends in College Student Spirituality" to 1,098 student affairs administrators who are members of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA).²¹² Survey respondents were asked to describe how their students were engaging in religious or spiritual activities and to assess how important these activities seem to be and how they were responding to student interest. Dalton sent surveys to administrators from all types of higher education institutions in every state and analyzed the survey data according to institutional type.²¹³

Dalton argues that the results of his study confirm that today's college students are interested in exploring spirituality and that this level of interest has increased in recent years. Specifically, 75 percent of respondents reported "an increase in student interest and involvement in spirituality over the past five years" (1998-2003).²¹⁴ In addition, 82

²⁰⁹ Stamm, "The Influence of Religion and Spirituality," 87.

²¹⁰ Stamm, "The Influence of Religion and Spirituality," 91.

²¹¹ Jon C. Dalton, "The Place of Spirituality in the Mission and Work of College Student Affairs," in *Encouraging Authenticity and Spirituality*, 145-164.

²¹² Dalton, "The Place of Spirituality," 155. Dalton received 248 completed surveys for a 23 percent response rate.

²¹³ Dalton, "The Place of Spirituality," 156. Dalton sent surveys to public colleges and universities, faith-based colleges, private secular colleges, community colleges and technical schools.

²¹⁴ Dalton, "The Place of Spirituality," 156.

percent of the respondents said that their students “were much more active in student organizations that have spirituality as a focus.”²¹⁵

Dalton asked questions to discern how student affairs administrators understand the relationship between spirituality and religion. He found that 78 percent of his respondents defined spirituality as “separate and distinct from religion.”²¹⁶ Dalton suggests that this finding means that student affairs professionals believe that student interest in spirituality is not simply a “renewed interest in religion or a new expression of religiosity among college students.”²¹⁷ Dalton found that student affairs professionals do not believe that student interest in spirituality implies a rejection of traditional religion. In fact, 80 percent of the respondents reported that they did not think that their students were dissatisfied with traditional religion while 56 percent saw student participation in religious activities increase over the last five years.²¹⁸ Dalton concludes that student affairs professionals must do a better job of both understanding and fostering student spiritual development as part of their mission to advance the holistic development of their students.

In 2002, Jenny J. Lee published the results of a study on the relationship between the college environment and changes in students’ religious belief and practice.²¹⁹ Lee used data from two studies annually conducted by HERI: the 1994 Freshman Survey and the 1998 College Student Survey. Together, these studies enabled her to track changes to

²¹⁵ Dalton, “The Place of Spirituality,” 159.

²¹⁶ Dalton, “The Place of Spirituality,” 157.

²¹⁷ Dalton, “The Place of Spirituality,” 157. Dalton notes that there is variation among the different institutions on this topic. Specifically, more professionals at faith-based colleges interpreted what was happening among their students as demonstrating renewed interest in religion.

²¹⁸ Dalton, “The Place of Spirituality,” 158.

²¹⁹ Jenny J. Lee, “Religion and College Attendance: Change Among Students,” *Review of Higher Education* 25, no. 4 (Summer 2002): 369-384, accessed September 13, 2012, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2002.0020>.

religious belief and practice by a national cohort of 4,000 college students at 76 four-year schools who were interviewed as first year students and seniors.²²⁰

One of Lee's research goals was to test the validity of secularization theories. Based on her data, she suggests that the impact of secularization on college students has been exaggerated. In fact, the students in her study were more likely to report stronger, not weaker, faith with 37.9 percent of seniors describing their faith as stronger, 48.3 percent describing no change, and 13.7 percent expressing weaker faith.²²¹ Lee also discovered that attending religious services or going to a school where peers actively attend services strengthens a person's religious conviction and that faculty-student interactions and student leadership training can enhance student religious belief.²²² Finally, Lee suggests that for the 13.7 percent of students who reported weaker faith, college can be a time of religious struggle and describes what she calls the liberalizing effect.²²³ Noting that the students who report weaker faith tend to be liberal, Lee argues that when students adopt more liberal views on issues such as abortion, sexual activity and marijuana use, they begin to question their religious beliefs because "most monotheistic ideologies" reject these behaviors.²²⁴

I have two issues with this liberalizing assertion. First, I am struck with how narrowly Lee understands religion in this country. There are in fact progressive monotheistic religious communities in this country more open to a diversity of opinion on these social issues. Secondly, I am skeptical about the assumption that when college

²²⁰ Lee, 372.

²²¹ Lee, 376-377.

²²² Lee, 382.

²²³ Lee, 382.

²²⁴ Lee, 382.

students adopt more liberal views, their religious beliefs become weaker. I question if this finding is based on a rather limited definition of what constitutes religious belief or how this belief is measured.

Findings from a study of religion on four college campuses conducted by Conrad Cherry, Betty A. DeBerg and Amanda Porterfield in the mid-1990's suggests that when religion is defined to include spirituality, undergraduate students appear to be actively engaged in religious exploration.²²⁵ This research team sought to test the validity of secularization theories that suggest the marginalization of religion in higher education and to respond to "the lack of firsthand, on-site examinations of religion on college campuses."²²⁶ The team intentionally selected four institutions with diverse historical backgrounds, relationships with religious traditions and geographic locations. The four institutions include a West Coast large public state university, two private schools with ties to religious traditions (one Northern Lutheran liberal arts college and one Eastern Catholic institution) and a Historically Black College originally affiliated with the Presbyterian Church but now a private, non-denominational school.²²⁷ Between 1996 and 1998, the research team immersed themselves within the campus culture of each school, using traditional ethnographic methods to assess the religious climate of each institution.

²²⁵ Conrad Cherry, Berry A. DeBerg, and Amanda Porterfield, *Religion on Campus: What Religion Really Means to Today's Undergraduate* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001.)

²²⁶ Cherry, DeBerg, and Porterfield, 6. The authors specifically mention theories advanced by George Marsden, Douglas Sloan and James Burtchaeil. The authors express skepticism of these secularization theories for four reasons: (1) these theories did not ring true to their own experiences; (2) changes in higher education and religion in this country may have led to the de-Christianization of higher education but not the complete marginalization of religion; (3) changes in our national religious landscape have been misidentified as secularization; and, (4) former leading advocates of secularization such as Peter Berger now reject these theories as inaccurate. For more information, see 4-6.

²²⁷ Cherry, DeBerg, and Porterfield, 6.

The research team discovered that undergraduate students today are more likely to describe themselves as “spiritual” than “religious” and prefer to talk about spirituality rather than religion.²²⁸ For many students, the word “religion” refers to established institutions with fixed sets of beliefs and practices while “spirituality” refers to “a personal experience of God or ultimate values” and often times to the notion of an ongoing quest to discern answers to deep questions.²²⁹ The authors conclude:

If the definition of religion includes spirituality as well as the more traditional, denominationally based forms of religious expression, we can say with utter confidence that opportunities for undergraduates to practice religion were widely available at all four schools.²³⁰

Cherry, DeBerg and Porterfield agree with Wuthnow and Tom Beaudoin regarding changes in the way Americans approach religion and the impact of these changes on today’s young people. Cherry, DeBerg and Porterfield observe that the students included their research “could be characterized as spiritual seekers rather than religious dwellers, and many of them were constructing their spirituality without much regard to the boundaries dividing religious denominations, traditions, or organizations.”²³¹

Cherry, DeBerg and Porterfield reject the different secularization theories. They argue that their research “reveals that the ethos of decentered, diverse, religiously tolerant institutions of higher education is a breeding ground for vital religious practice and teaching.”²³² And, they contend “(i)t is possible that young people in American culture have never been more enthusiastically engaged in religious practice or with religious

²²⁸ Cherry, DeBerg, and Porterfield, 275-276.

²²⁹ Cherry, DeBerg, and Porterfield, 275.

²³⁰ Cherry, DeBerg, and Porterfield, 275.

²³¹ Cherry, DeBerg, and Porterfield, 276-277.

²³² Cherry, DeBerg, and Porterfield, 295.

ideas.”²³³

The studies noted so far suggest that the college students are interested in religion or spirituality when spirituality is broadly defined. These studies also seem to indicate that certain secularization theories that suggest that participation in higher education leads young adults to become less religious are no longer accurate. However, several other studies draw different conclusions.

Jeremy E. Uecker, Mark D. Regnerus and Margaret L. Vaaler, based on research with data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, suggest that students’ religious beliefs do not change significantly while in college.²³⁴ The researchers used data from Wave I conducted in 1994-1995 and Wave III conducted in 2001-2002 to identify and assess three types of religious decline among college students: (1) less frequent religious service attendance; (2) a decrease in student self-reported views on the importance of religion; and, (3) an increase in student disaffiliation with religion.²³⁵ The researchers found that while participation in religious services declines in college, 82 percent of the students in their study maintained “at least a static level of personal religiosity in early adulthood” and “86 percent retain their religious affiliation.”²³⁶ Thus they conclude that “religious belief systems go largely untouched for

²³³ Cherry, DeBerg, and Porterfield, 294-295.

²³⁴ Jeremy E. Uecker, Mark D. Regnerus, and Margaret L. Vaaler, “Losing My Religion: The Social Sources of Religious Decline in Early Adulthood,” *Social Forces* 85, no. 4 (June 2007): 1667-1692, accessed September, 13, 2012, <http://sf.oxfordjournals.org/content/85/4/1667.full.pdf+html>.

²³⁵ Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler, 1672-1673. The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health is a school-based study of health-related attitudes and behaviors funded by 18 federal agencies. Wave I data was collected from interviews with 20,745 adolescents in grades 7-12 and their parents, partners, friends, family members, other students and school administrators. The study uses 132 schools that are nationally representative. Wave III data came from interviews with 15,197 young adults included in Wave I. Over 99 percent of these young people were ages 18-25.

²³⁶ Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler, 1683. The study suggests that 69 percent of all young adults in their survey (not just college students) who attended a religious service at least once a month while they were adolescents reported attending less often as young adults. And, while 20 percent expressed a decline in the

the duration of their education.”²³⁷

They offer two explanations for these findings. First, many of today’s students attend college to get a degree rather than to engage in intellectual or personal inquiry and these students are able to graduate from our modern universities without being forced to confront or defend their personal religious beliefs. Second, many young adults are indifferent to religion or do not know enough about their religious tradition to recognize “faith-challenging material when it appears” while religious students expect that their faith will be challenged at school and do not feel threatened when this occurs.²³⁸ Finally, the authors conclude that there is a new respect for religion in undergraduate education today. They write that

the arrival of postmodern, post-positivist thought on university campuses has served to legitimate religiosity and spirituality, even in intellectual circles. Together with heightened emphasis on religious tolerance and emerging emphases on spiritual development, antireligious hostility on campus may even be at a decades-long low.²³⁹

In fact, the young adults who did not attend college in their study demonstrated less religious engagement and commitment than young adults in college.

Religion and Emerging Adulthood

While the studies highlighted thus far have focused specifically upon college students, I will consider the results of a comprehensive study of religious and spiritual attitudes of all young adults known as the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR).

The results of this research were published in *Souls in Transition: The Religious and*

importance of religion, only 17 percent completely disaffiliated from religion. For more information, see 1676.

²³⁷ Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler, 1683.

²³⁸ Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler, 1683-1684.

²³⁹ Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler, 1684.

Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults by Christian Smith with Patricia Snell. The NSYR researchers surveyed 2,458 emerging adults ages 18 to 23 between September 24, 2007 and April 21, 2008 via the telephone.²⁴⁰ The research team also conducted personal interviews with 230 of these individuals in order to receive more in-depth information about the emerging adult's family, social, and religious and spiritual life.²⁴¹

Characteristics of Emerging Adulthood

The NYSR researchers argue we as a nation must address a number of critical challenges to ensure the healthy moral and religious growth of our young people. Smith and Snell make the following observations about emerging adulthood religion and spirituality.²⁴²

(1) Emerging Adulthood As a Distinct Life Phase: Smith and Snell argue that emerging adulthood is a unique life phase during which young people engage “in intense identity exploration” and delay making major life decisions.²⁴³ While many emerging adults possess a sense of hope about their future, emerging adulthood is a time of “a great deal of transience, confusion, anxiety, self-obsession, melodrama, conflict, stress, disappointment, and sometimes emotional damage and bodily harm.”²⁴⁴

The NYSR data shows that “(e)merging adults are, on most sociological

²⁴⁰ Christian Smith, with Patricia Snell, 3-4, 309. This most recent study is the third-wave of a larger national study conducted by Smith and others through the National Survey of Youth and Religion. In 2005, Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton published the results of a national survey of 3,290 youth ages 13-17 regarding their religious beliefs and practices in *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

²⁴¹ Smith, with Snell, 3-4, 312.

²⁴² Smith, with Snell offer three observations that are not included in this summary of their research: (1) the NYSR data shows the role caring adults can play in helping youth and emerging adults develop faith; (2) liberal Protestant values now predominate American culture but emerging adults do not share Protestantism's sense of hope or commitment to civic engagement; and, (3) Evangelical Christianity has left its mark of emerging adults who express a commitment to religion out of a need for personal happiness and based on personal choice. For more information, see Smith, with Snell, 283-292.

²⁴³ Smith, with Snell, 6.

²⁴⁴ Smith, with Snell, 280.

measures, clearly the least religious adults in the United States today.”²⁴⁵ At the same time, the team explored the level of religiosity for this generation of emerging adults to previous generations of emerging adults and conclude that “the preponderance of evidence here shows emerging adults ages 18 to 25 actually *remaining the same or growing more religious* between 1972 and 2006.”²⁴⁶

(2) Emerging Adulthood and Religious Continuity and Change: Smith and Snell found that most emerging adults do not change their religious perspective when entering this distinct life phase but the religiosity of a large minority of emerging adults does decline while a smaller group of emerging adults grow increasingly religious.²⁴⁷ While 50 percent or more of the young people in this study stayed in the same religious tradition between adolescence and emerging adulthood, “substantial minorities” switched to a new tradition and in most cases, these young people became nonreligious.²⁴⁸ Overall, 78 percent of emerging adults said they believe in God.²⁴⁹ And, 44 percent of emerging adults said their faith was “extremely” or “very important” to them compared to 26.8 percent who said their faith is “not very important” or “not important at all.”²⁵⁰

(3) Dominant Attitudes About Religion:²⁵¹ Smith and Snell claim that emerging adults

²⁴⁵ Smith, with Snell, 281.

²⁴⁶ Smith, with Snell, 101. *Italics in the original.*

²⁴⁷ Smith, with Snell, 283.

²⁴⁸ Smith, with Snell, 111. For example, 50 percent of Mainline Protestant adolescents left their tradition by emerging adulthood with 24 percent now identifying themselves as nonreligious. Likewise, 37 percent of Jewish adolescents identified themselves as nonreligious in emerging adulthood. And yet, about 30 percent of adolescents who identified themselves as nonreligious joined a religious tradition by emerging adulthood. For more information, see 109.

²⁴⁹ Smith, with Snell, 112.

²⁵⁰ Smith, with Snell, 112-113.

²⁵¹ In the 2005 book *Soul Searching*, Smith and Denton argued that many adolescents follow a new religion called Morally Therapeutic Deism (MTD) that is based on five central beliefs: (1) there is a creating God who watches out for human beings and the world; (2) God desires human beings to treat one another fairly; (3) our life goals are to be happy and to like oneself; (4) God is really only necessary for people when they have problems; and, (5) when good people die, they go to heaven. In *Souls in Transition*, written in 2009,

are open to talking about religion and many have very favorable attitudes about it but most do not believe that it is relevant to their daily lives. When emerging adults do talk about religion, they say that all religions have the same basic purpose which is to teach people how to live good, moral lives. Emerging adults also view religion as a matter of personal choice, accept moral relativism or the notion that there is more than one way to understand truth, and do not believe it is their place to judge others.

(4) The Challenges of Intellectual and Cultural Influences: The authors argue that emerging adults are struggling to respond to numerous sociological changes.

Specifically, intellectual and cultural movements such as deconstructive postmodernism, social constructivism and cultural relativism as well as the rise in multiculturalism in education have caused emerging adults to doubt the existence of any absolute truth, to believe all knowledge is relative or that truth is determined based solely upon one's personal experience.²⁵² At the same time, American society has not provided young people with the education to make moral judgments or decisions.

(5) Six Approaches to Religion: The NSYR researchers developed six categories of how emerging adults understand religion and spirituality. They believe that only 15 percent of all emerging adults identify themselves as committed to a particular faith tradition while another 30 percent selectively adhere to the beliefs and practices of a religious tradition.²⁵³ Twenty five percent of emerging adults are indifferent to matters of religion, five percent are totally disconnected to religion because they have had little to

Smith and Snell suggest that MTD is still popular with many of today's emerging adults but that it has been diluted as emerging adults express a wider range of opinions about their religious beliefs. For more information, see Smith, with Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 154-156.

²⁵² Smith, with Snell, 292-293.

²⁵³ Smith, with Snell, 166-167.

no exposure to it and 10 percent express skepticism about and have rejected personal faith.²⁵⁴ Only 15 percent of emerging adults are open or mildly interested in spirituality or religious or spiritual matters.²⁵⁵

(6) Influence of Spirituality Overestimated: Smith and Snell argue that claims that emerging adults are interested in spirituality are overblown. They note that their data suggests that only 15 percent of all emerging adults indicate any sort of openness to spirituality but are not necessarily engaged in a spiritual quest. They are simply open to talking about spirituality. The authors contend that a number of studies that demonstrate increased interest in spirituality among young adults are methodologically flawed and that some researchers use nonrepresentative samples to promote a particular ideological agenda.²⁵⁶

I take issue with the way in which Smith and Snell reach this conclusion. It is my sense that many of the people who are advocating that emerging adults care about spirituality define spirituality differently than the NYSR research team. I think that it is possible that some of the emerging adults who Smith and Snell describe as Selective Adherents or young people who selectively adopt particular elements of their tradition may be characterized in other studies as young people interested in spirituality.

(7) Religious Belief and Positive Life Outcomes: The NYSR data suggests that religion matters because students who are affiliated with a religion have better life outcomes.²⁵⁷ The NYSR research team classified emerging adults into four groups based

²⁵⁴ Smith, with Snell, 168.

²⁵⁵ Smith, with Snell, 167.

²⁵⁶ Smith, with Snell, 296.

²⁵⁷ Smith, with Snell, 297. The research team assessed whether their observations about the relationship between religion and positive life outcomes are merely correlations or if there is some causal relationship

on their level of religious commitment: (1) the Devoted; (2) the Regular; (3) the Sporadic; and, (4) the Disengaged. The data suggests that emerging adults who express more religious devotion have more positive life outcomes on a vast array of measures such as the level of engagement in risky behaviors and substance abuse and overall health and well-being, among other outcomes.

The NYSR and College Students

The NYSR researchers examined the impact of college on the religious and spiritual life of emerging adults. Based on their research, Smith and Snell conclude that the religious climate on college campuses is changing and that “(h)igher education no longer seems to diminish the religion of emerging adults.”²⁵⁸ The NYSR researchers compared the overall religiousness of emerging adults attending college during the third wave of their study with emerging adults not in college. They also examined how college students fared compared to non-college attending emerging adults in terms of how often they attended religious services, prayed, and read scriptures and how they described the importance of their faith. The data suggests that emerging adults in college are “slightly more religious than those who are not in college” although the differences between these

between the two variables. They conclude that “the weight of evidence strongly suggests that definite causal religious effects are at work producing the outcomes differences.” Smith, with Snell, 277. The team also controlled for a variety of other factors such as gender, race, age, region of residence and other factors and still found “many significant differences across religious types and conclude that the religious effects they observed are real, not spurious.” Smith, with Snell, 277.

²⁵⁸ Smith, with Snell, 248. Smith and Snell highlight eight factors that may explain the changing nature of the campus climate: (1) the growing influence of campus ministry groups; (2) increased interest in religion and spirituality by higher education professionals; (3) the increase influence of evangelical faculty on secular campuses; (4) the growing number of religious colleges; (5) college students are more concerned about good jobs and money than engaging big questions about religious belief; (6) the growing influence of critical theories and schools of thought more favorable to religion such as positivism, epistemological foundationalism and scientism; (7) the tendency of this generation of young adults to accept family’s religious commitments; and, (8) larger social changes that are moving the U.S. into a postsecular age in which Americans demonstrate increase interest in religion. For more information, Smith, with Snell, 249-250.

two groups is not that big.²⁵⁹

In 2011, Christian Smith, Kari Christoffersen, Hilary Davidson and Patricia Snell Herzog published *Lost In Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* based on the 230 NYSR interviews.²⁶⁰ Their basic conclusion is that “emerging adult life in the United States today is beset with real problems, in some cases troubling and even heartbreaking problems.”²⁶¹ They describe emerging adults as unable to make critically informed moral decisions or to develop a coherent set of moral beliefs. Rather, emerging adults are captivated by consumerism and do not agree that citizens in a democratic society need to work together to advance the common good. Emerging adults are not politically or civically engaged and fail to see “the value of a broad education for shaping people into informed and responsible citizens in civic life, for producing members and leaders of society who can work together toward the common good.”²⁶² The researchers conclude that the country is failing our emerging adults. They write:

If our analysis in this book is correct, then it may not be too strong to suggest that we are failing to equip teenagers and emerging adults with the basic tools for good moral reasoning. We are failing to teach them how to deal constructively with moral, cultural, and ideological differences. We are failing to teach them to think about what is good for people and in life. We are failing to equip our youth with the ideas, tools, and practices to know how to negotiate their romantic and sexual lives in healthy, nondestructive ways that prepare them to achieve the happy, functional marriages and families that most of them say they want in future years.

²⁵⁹ Smith, with Snell, 250-251.

²⁶⁰ Christian Smith, with Kari Christoffersen, Hilary Davidson, and Patricia Snell Herzog, *Lost In Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

²⁶¹ Smith, with Christoffersen, Davidson, and Herzog, 3.

²⁶² Smith, with Christoffersen, Davidson, and Herzog, 102.

They continue:

We are failing to teach our youth about life purposes and goals that matter more than the accumulation of material possessions and material comfort and security. We are failing to challenge the too-common need to be intoxicated, the apparent inability to live a good, fun life without being under the influence of alcohol or drugs. And we are failing to teach our youth the importance of civic engagement and political participation, how to be active citizens of their communities and nation, how to think about and live for the common good. On all these matters, if our analysis is correct, the adult world is simply abdicating its responsibilities.²⁶³

Reflections

The research highlighted in this chapter offers important implications for religion and higher education. First, this research indicates that the religious and spiritual climate on America's college campuses has changed. While researchers disagree about the level of interest expressed by today's students regarding religion and spirituality, they do generally agree that religion and spirituality have a real presence on college campuses around the country.

Since the publication of Chickering, Dalton and Stamm's book in 2006, higher education administrators have become more interested in discussing how we can support the spiritual growth of today's college students. In fact, the theme of the 2011 conference for the National Association for Student Affairs Professionals (NASPA), the largest student affairs professional association in this country, was *Educating for Lives of Purpose*. Keynote speakers and workshops focused on developing a deeper understanding of what living with purpose really means, how student affairs professionals can help students identify a calling and prepare them for purposeful lives and how to

²⁶³ Smith, with Christoffersen, Davidson, and Herzog, 237-238.

support the vocational growth of student affairs professionals themselves.²⁶⁴

In addition, private foundations are encouraging colleges and universities to offer programs to support the spiritual, religious and vocational development of their students. Through the Programs for the Theological Exploration of Vocation (PTEV), the Lilly Endowment provided grants totaling over \$176 million to 88 colleges between 2000-2002 to implement initiatives focused on vocation and undergraduate education.²⁶⁵ Participating colleges initiated programs to encourage students to examine the relationship between faith and vocation, to consider Christian ministry as a vocation and to strengthen the ability of faculty and staff to mentor students about living a purposeful life. The Endowment later awarded three year renewal grants to 69 institutions.²⁶⁶ The PTEV schools received educational resources such as books, articles and lectures by leading scholars on young adult religious and spiritual development, vocation and career discernment. Upon the conclusion of PTEV, the Lilly Endowment and the Council of Independent Colleges established the Network for the Theological Exploration of Vocation (NetVUE) to promote scholarship in the area of the exploration of vocation in undergraduate education.

Secondly, while some studies suggest that attending college no longer leads to the erosion of faith among undergraduate students, other recent research studies such as the HERI study and the research by Stamm, Dalton, and Cherry, DeBerg and Porterfield indicate that today's students are interested in exploring spirituality, broadly defined.

²⁶⁴ National Association for Student Affairs Professionals, *NASPA Call for Programs*, August 24, 2010, accessed September 29, 2012, <http://blogs.utexas.edu/heaspa/2010/08/24/nasap-call-for-programs-sept-3/>.

²⁶⁵ Lilly Endowment, "PTEV: History," accessed April 10, 2012, <http://www.ptev.org/history.aspx?iid=48>.

²⁶⁶ Lilly Endowment, "Lilly Endowment Announces Renewal Grants in PTEV Initiative," May 23, 2006, accessed October 15, 2006, <http://www.lillyendowment.org/pdf/TheologicalExofVoc2006winners.pdf>. In this press release, the Endowment indicated that it spent over \$217 million on PTEV. However, this total is an estimate because the Endowment was still considering late proposals.

Further, these studies confirm that while college students are less likely to attend religious services or engage in particular religious practices, today's students are actively examining and questioning their religious and spiritual beliefs. This is exactly what human development theorists suggest young adults should do while they are in college.

Thirdly, the HERI study suggests that helping students to engage their spirituality can improve their academic performance, leadership skills and other outcomes. For example, the HERI researchers found that in general, “*students’ level of psychological well-being declines during the college years.*”²⁶⁷ Students in their junior year are more likely to express experiencing stress and anxiety and to more frequently feel overwhelmed than first year students. And yet, “students who show substantial growth in (E)quanimity during the undergraduate years also benefit in terms of a greater sense of psychological well-being, greater-than-average development of leadership skills, and higher levels of satisfaction with their college experience.”²⁶⁸

The results of the HERI study confirm findings by George D. Kuh and Robert M. Gonyea released in 2006.²⁶⁹ Kuh and Gonyea used data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to explore spirituality in higher education. They found that students who engage in practices to nurture their spirituality such as attending worship or engaging in prayer and meditation possess a higher level of engagement in college.²⁷⁰ These students are more likely to attend cultural events, engage in community service and extracurricular activities and express somewhat more satisfaction with school and the

²⁶⁷ Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, 121. Italics in the original.

²⁶⁸ Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, 122-123.

²⁶⁹ George D. Kuh and Robert M. Gonyea, “Spirituality, Liberal Learning, and College Student Engagement,” *Liberal Education* 92, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 40-47.

²⁷⁰ Kuh and Gonyea, 44.

out-of-class environment of their school.²⁷¹ Likewise, Kuh and Gonyea confirmed that engagement in religious or spiritual practices at school helps students grow personally and socially due a deepened sense of spirituality.²⁷²

The NYSR data suggests that emerging adults, including college students, who express a higher level of religious devotion have more positive life outcomes than those who do not. Specifically, emerging adults who are highly devoted to religious belief and practice are more prepared to live a meaningful and purposeful life.²⁷³ These young people are more likely to plan for the future, possess more clearly defined life goals, express a sense of being loved and possess a greater sense of personal agency than emerging adults who are not religiously engaged.²⁷⁴ This suggests that college administrators, chaplains, interfaith directors, faculty and other mentors must help students who are not religiously engaged to develop a similar sense of self-confidence, personal happiness and well-being, direction and purpose.

I am not advocating that educators and mentors should try to turn nonreligious students into religious devotees or that students who express a commitment to religion are somehow superior to nonreligious students. Rather, I am suggesting that we can and should work with nonreligious emerging adults to help them identify their core values

²⁷¹ Kuh and Gonyea, 44.

²⁷² Kuh and Gonyea, 44.

²⁷³ Smith, with Snell, 257-278. The researchers offer a series of very detailed tables to highlight how emerging adults with different levels of commitment to religion fare in terms of life outcomes. The overall picture suggests that emerging adults identified by Smith and Snell as The Devoted report much more focused life goals and outcomes than the Disengaged.

²⁷⁴ Smith, with Snell, 257-278. For example, 63 percent of Devoted emerging adults report thinking about the meaning of life fairly or very often compared to 32 percent of the Disengaged and 44 percent of all emerging adults. See Table 9.6, 266. Only 9 percent of the Devoted describe lacking a good sense what they want to accomplish in life compared to 25 percent of Disengaged and 21 percent of all emerging adults. See Table 9.8, 268. Additionally, 88 percent of the Devoted rarely or never feel like life is meaningless compared 74 percent of Disengaged and 80 percent of all emerging adults and 82 percent of the Devoted describe feeling loved a lot compared to 69 percent of Disengaged and 73 percent of all emerging adults. See Table 9.7, 267.

and beliefs and how these commitments can help them develop a coherent personal life philosophy or worldview that will empower them to live purposeful lives. These beliefs may come from a variety of nonreligious sources such as psychological theory, political and moral philosophy, the historical wisdom traditions, other secular humanist sources and personal life experience. But this data confirms what Parks and others suggest which is that emerging adults who develop a coherent life philosophy do in fact have better personal life outcomes.

The students I encounter every day as a religious life director at a small liberal arts college possess many of the attitudes and beliefs about religion and spirituality revealed in the longitudinal HERI study as well as the research conducted by Stamm. While we have a small group of dedicated religious students on campus, the majority of our students have no interest in religion. However, a large minority of students do express a commitment to spirituality as broadly defined. These students are interested in dealing with existential questions about the meaning of life and in discerning how they can live a life of purpose dedicated to the common good.

It is important to note several qualifying facts. First, it could be the case that students who attend liberal arts colleges select these institutions because they are interested in exploring philosophical and existential questions. Secondly, this particular college has a reputation of being politically progressive and committed to diversity, social justice, social activism and civic engagement. Many students select this institution because of this reputation. Thus, these students are already predisposed to identifying careers and other ways that they can serve the common good. In addition, participation in religious and spiritual programming on campus is optional. The students I meet every

day already possess at least a minimal or basic interest in religion and spirituality or else they would not attend our programs or express an interest in meeting with me.

If these studies are correct, then today's college students are interested in exploring religion and spirituality. Many colleges and universities are beginning to pay attention to these concerns and developing programs to help facilitate student spiritual growth. And, yet, more work needs to be done. In particular, faculty need to become more engaged in this conversation. We will return to this discussion of how particular institutions of higher education are currently working to address the spiritual development of their students later.

CHAPTER 3

VOCATION AND COLLEGE STUDENTS

Introduction

The doctrine of vocation is central to the Christian faith. The word “vocation,” derived from the Latin *vocatio*, means “calling.”²⁷⁵ Within the Christian tradition, vocation refers to the belief that God calls individuals to the Christian faith and to a life of service. The concept of vocation has been the subject of scrutiny over the years as Christians struggle to understand what being called God really means. Questions include: Does vocation refer only to people who feel called into ordained ministry or does everyone possess a vocation? Is our calling limited to our career or does God’s call refer to other parts of our life? William C. Placher, editor of *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation*, observes that through out the history of Christianity, we have seen a variety of ways to understand vocation.²⁷⁶ And yet, over the centuries “Christianity has preserved the fundamental idea that our lives count for something because God has a direction in mind for them.”²⁷⁷

Questions about meaning and purpose are important to college students. Sharon Daloz Parks and others describe young adulthood as time of deep exploration as young people develop personal systems of belief and meaning.²⁷⁸ This includes engaging existential questions about the meaning of life and identity questions about personal

²⁷⁵ John R. Walchenbach, “Vocation,” in *The Westminster Handbook to Reformed Theology*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 231.

²⁷⁶ William C. Placher, “Christian Callings in a Post-Christian World, 1800-Present, Introduction,” in *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation*, ed. William C. Placher (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 329.

²⁷⁷ Placher, “Introduction,” 3.

²⁷⁸ Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000).

purpose and vocation. While some young adults find answers to these questions in their religious and spiritual traditions, many do not feel at home within the established religious traditions and lack a coherent worldview that can help them answers these questions. I suggest that it is possible to use insights from Christianity and other religions as well as secular sources to help all college students identify how they can live out their vocation or how they can live a meaningful life with a commitment to the common good. In this chapter, I explore historical and contemporary understandings of vocation and how we can draw upon these perspectives to speak to the concerns of today's college students.

Historical Overview

The Early Church

Both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament describe how God calls communities of people and specific individuals to serve God. In the Hebrew Bible, the verb *qara* ' is translated as "to call" or "to summon" or "to name."²⁷⁹ It is used in the Hebrew scriptures to refer to how God calls the people of Israel into loving relationship and service. It is also used to indicate how God calls individuals such as Moses, David and others to particular and often astounding tasks.²⁸⁰

In the New Testament, the Greek word *klésis* or "calling" is used by Paul to describe how God calls people to "a life of faith" and service.²⁸¹ Paul also uses the term

²⁷⁹ Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds. *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979), 894-896.

²⁸⁰ Douglas J. Schuurman, *Vocation: Discerning Our Callings in Life* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), 31.

²⁸¹ Placher, "Introduction," 4-5.

to describe how God calls individuals to particular stations in life or vocations.²⁸² Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 7:20-24:

Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called. Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it. Even if you can gain your freedom, make use of your present condition now more than ever. For whoever was called into the Lord as a slave is a freed person belonging to the Lord, just as whoever was free when called is a slave of Christ. You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of human masters. In whatever condition you were called, brothers and sisters, there remain with God.²⁸³

The belief that all Christians possess a vocation developed during the Reformation. Placher suggests that during the early church period, the main vocational questions Christians and potential converts considered were whether to become a Christian and how public to be about their faith.²⁸⁴ During the first three centuries of the church, Christians were considered suspect because they refused to participate in the Roman civic religion and lived under the threat of persecution. Placher notes that “(a) call to follow Christ only rarely ended in martyrdom, but the possibility was something any Christian had to at least consider.”²⁸⁵ Thus, martyrs or people who died defending their Christian faith served as models of Christian discipleship. John McGuckin adds:

The idea of the martyr as the true disciple left its impress on Christianity for ages afterwards. Not all might be called to follow their way of suffering, but those who had been tried and executed for the faith became the supreme symbols of the disciples who had entered into a profound imitation of the suffering Lord.²⁸⁶

With the conversion of Constantine in 312 CE, Christians faced new vocational questions. Placher observes that as it became more socially acceptable to be Christian,

²⁸² Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed., rev. and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 435-436.

²⁸³ 1 Cor. 7:20-24 (New Revised Standard Version).

²⁸⁴ Placher, “Introduction,” 6.

²⁸⁵ Placher, “Callings to a Christian Life: Vocations in the Early Church, 100-500, Introduction,” 26.

²⁸⁶ John McGuckin, “The Early Church Fathers,” in *The Story of Christian Spirituality: Two Thousand years, From East to West*, ed. Gordon Mursell (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 50-51.

Christians began to consider if it had “become too easy to be a Christian?”²⁸⁷ It was during this period that the earliest forms of Christian asceticism and monasticism were born. Christians influenced by the writings of Origen, who argued that the key to spiritual growth was to purify one’s mind and retain rigid control over one’s body, moved into the wilderness in Syria and Egypt to practice fasting, self-denial, intense study and prayer.²⁸⁸ In time, these desert fathers and mothers began to attract followers who moved to the desert to practice asceticism in seclusion or monastic communities.²⁸⁹ By the fifth century, monastic communities began to appear in Western Europe inspired, in part, by this desert monastic movement.²⁹⁰ In time, vocation became associated with men and women who joined these orders.²⁹¹ The key vocational question “for most medieval Christians was whether to choose a celibate life in service of the church.”²⁹² By the time Western Europe entered the Reformation, vocation was considered something only “religious” people possessed.

The Reformation

The Reformation was a time of significant religious, political, cultural and economic change in Western Europe. Martin Luther, an Augustian monk and theologian,

²⁸⁷ Placher, “Callings to a Christian Life: Vocations in the Early Church,” 31.

²⁸⁸ McGuckin, “The Early Church Fathers,” 57.

²⁸⁹ Placher, “Callings to a Christian Life: Vocations in the Early Church,” 31-32.

²⁹⁰ John Cassian, a Christian who had lived with Egyptian monks during his youth, established two monasteries in southern France in fifth century. Placher, “Introduction to John Cassian Institutes,” 115. Benedict of Nursua established twelve monasteries in the Aniene valley in Italy in the sixth century and additional monastic orders formed through out Western Europe during the Middle Ages. These include the monastic community in Cluny, France formed in the 900’s, the Cistercian Order led by Bernard of Clairvaux in the 1100’s, the Franciscans founded by Francis of Assisi, and the Dominicans founded by Dominic with the early 1200’s. The Beguines, founded in the later 1200’s in Flanders, offered women the opportunity to live in community and to engage in regular prayer and acts of charity without taking formal vows. For more information, see Placher, “Called to a Religious Life: Vocations in the Middle Ages, 500-1500, Introduction,” 107-114 and David Farmer, “Saints and Mystics of the Medieval West,” in *The Story of Christian Spirituality*, 89-124.

²⁹¹ Placher, “Called to a Religious Life: Vocations in the Middle Ages 500-1500, Introduction,” 112.

²⁹² Placher, “Called to a Religious Life: Vocations in the Middle Ages 500-1500, Introduction,” 107.

sparked the Reformation in 1517 by challenging the church's practices of selling indulgences for the forgiveness of sins. At the heart of Luther's theology was the premise that Christians are saved by grace through faith alone, not from their works or actions. Luther argued for *sola scriptura* or that people learn the Word of God through scripture as guided by the Holy Spirit rather than through the pope or other ecclesial authorities.²⁹³

Luther advocated a new understanding of the priesthood through his doctrine of the priesthood of all believers or the belief that every Christian has the responsibility to serve as a priest to one another. Luther first articulated this concept in his address "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation." Luther relied upon 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 to argue that because Christians are united in one baptism and one faith, all are called to the same spiritual estate.²⁹⁴ Luther used 1 Peter 2:9 to assert that everyone who receives baptism is a member of Christ's royal priesthood; thus, every Christian is called to pray and teach the gospel.²⁹⁵ Luther did not argue for the elimination of the ordained priesthood but he advocated that the priesthood was just a church office and that priests serve at the will of the community.²⁹⁶

In "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," published on October 6, 1520, Luther expanded the priesthood of all believers concept to argue for the elimination of all

²⁹³ Eunjoo Mary Kim, *Women Preaching: Theology and Practice through the Ages* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2004), 81. Kim notes that Luther relied on 2 Corinthians 3:5-6 in particular to make this claim.

²⁹⁴ Martin Luther, "To Christian Nobility of the German Nation," trans. Charles M. Jacobs, rev. James Atkinson, in *Three Treatises*, 2nd rev. ed., [ed. Helmut T. Lehmann], (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 12.

²⁹⁵ Luther, "To Christian Nobility," 12.

²⁹⁶ Luther, "To Christian Nobility," 14.

religious vows or orders.²⁹⁷ Luther reiterated that the priesthood was not a sacrament but a church rite through which the community authorized the ordination of priests. He warned people considering joining a religious order or the priesthood not to do so unless they understood

that the works of monks and priests, however holy and arduous they may be, do not differ one whit in the sight of God from the works of the rustic laborer in the field or the woman going about her household tasks, but that all works are measured before God by faith alone.²⁹⁸

Luther significantly altered the notion of vocation by suggesting that every Christian is called to love and serve God and neighbor. Thus, every Christian has a vocation, not just “religious” men and women. In fact, Luther argued that every Christian has two types of vocation: a “spiritual calling” to “become part of the people of God,” and an “external calling” or particular calling uniquely defined by each person’s life situation or station.²⁹⁹ Within this particular calling, a person has multiple vocations due to his or her familial and work responsibilities. Luther highlights this in his lecture on Genesis in which he wrote:

This life is profitably divided into three orders: (1) life in the home; (2) life in the state; (3) life in the church. To whatever order you belong—whether you are a husband, an officer of the state, or a teacher of the church—look about you, and see whether you have done full justice to your calling and there is no need of asking to be pardoned for negligence, dissatisfaction, or impatience.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁷ “Introduction” to “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church,” trans. A. T. Steinhäuser, rev. Frederick C. Ahrens and Abdel Ross Wentz, in *Three Treatises*, 2nd rev. ed., [ed. Helmut T. Lehmann], 118-119.

²⁹⁸ Luther, “The Babylonian Captivity,” 202-203.

²⁹⁹ Placher, “Every Work a Calling: Vocations after the Reformation, 1500-1800, Introduction,” 206.

³⁰⁰ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 15-20*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. George V. Schick; vol. 3 of *Luther’s Works*, American ed., ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), 217. D. Michael Bennethum, author of *Listen! God is Calling! Luther Speaks of Vocation, Faith and Work*, highlights this particular quote in his discussion on how Luther interpreted vocation in light of his understanding of God and creation. Bennethum notes that Luther believed that God is active in all parts of the created order, and thus, every person has been called by God into service. For more information, see Michael Bennethum, *Listen! God is Calling! Luther Speaks of Vocation, Faith and Work* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003), 50-52.

D. Michael Bennethum discusses how three beliefs Luther advocated about creation are linked to Luther's understanding of vocation: (1) God's gift of creation is good and since God ordered human beings to work in Genesis 1:28, work itself is also good; (2) God the Creator is an active, "on-going reality" in human history; and, (3) Christians participate in God's creative work through their daily work and faithful service.³⁰¹ Thus, all people, regardless of their social status, are divinely called to live out a vocation. Luther makes this point in his lecture on Genesis 17:9 writing:

Thus, every person surely has a calling. While attending to it he serves God. A king serves God when he is at pains to look after and govern his people. So do the mother of a household when she tends to her baby, the father of a household when he gains a livelihood by working, and a pupil when he applies himself diligently to his studies.³⁰²

Luther continues in this same lecture, writing: "Therefore, it is a great wisdom when a human being does what God commands and earnestly devotes himself to his vocation without taking into consideration what others are doing."³⁰³

Gustaf Wingren notes that Luther believed there was a direct relationship between vocation and service.³⁰⁴ Wingren examines the connection between Luther's understanding of vocation and his belief in two kingdoms. Luther argued that there were two kingdoms: the kingdom of God under the authority of the church in which Christ reigned; and the kingdom of the world ruled by the law and civil authorities. Luther believed that vocation belonged to this earthly kingdom and that one's vocation is always

³⁰¹ Bennethum, 50-51. It should be noted that while Luther identified human labor as good, he also strongly argued that our salvation is based on the grace of Jesus Christ and not on our efforts.

³⁰² Luther, *Lectures on Genesis 15-20*. Bennethum also uses this quote in his discussion of Luther and creation. See Bennethum, 46.

³⁰³ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis 15-20*. Bennethum also uses this quote in his discussion of Luther and creation. See Bennethum, 46.

³⁰⁴ Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957).

directed to serving one's neighbor. Wingren observes that

our station or office, i.e. our vocation, is simply our mandate concerning the works man ought to do here in God's earthly realm, while he awaits death. God has so constituted this vocation that, quite apart from man's devoutness and love, others are served by vocation when it is fulfilled.³⁰⁵

One's neighbor includes all of the people a Christian may interact with in his or her daily life including one's family, friends, co-workers and people living in one's neighborhood.

As Wingren suggests, when Christians joyfully live out our vocation, we serve as channels of God's love which flows through us and reaches out to others.³⁰⁶

Luther frequently wrote about how we live out our vocations through loving service and the powerful impact this could have on families and communities. And, he believed that God expects us to fulfill our vocations no matter how lowly or burdensome they may be. Luther made reference to the cross of vocation or notion that God expects Christians to model their efforts to fulfill their vocations after Jesus Christ who suffered and died on the cross. Wingren writes:

To understand what is meant by the cross of vocation, we need only remember that vocation is ordained by God to benefit, not him who fulfills the vocation, but the neighbor who, standing alongside, bears his own cross for the sake of others. Under this cross are included even the most trivial of difficulties, such as: in marriage, the care of babes, which interferes with sleep and enjoyment; in government, unruly subjects and promoters of revolt; in the ministry, the whole resistance to reformation; in heavy labor, shabbiness, uncleanness, and the contempt of the proud. All of this is bracketed with the high and holy cross of Christ; but then that too was deep in humiliation when it was erected.³⁰⁷

Finally, Luther contended that it is one's responsibility to respond to only one's call rather than trying to engage in someone else's vocation. Luther wrote in *The Gospel for the Sunday after Christmas, Luke 2:33-40*, that "(t)o leave one's own calling and to

³⁰⁵ Wingren, 125.

³⁰⁶ Wingren, 126.

³⁰⁷ Wingren, 29.

attach oneself to alien undertakings, surely amounts to walking on one's ears, to veiling one's feet, to putting a shoe on one's head, and turning everything upside down."³⁰⁸ In his reflections on Genesis 17:9, Luther writes: "Therefore it is necessary to observe the rule that everyone should remain in his calling and live content with his gifts but should not be inquisitive about other people."³⁰⁹

John Calvin was the leader of the Reformation in Geneva. Calvin agreed with Luther that human beings are saved by faith in Jesus Christ alone. Calvin emphasized the providence of God who he referred to as the "everlasting Governor and Preserver" who "sustains, nourishes, and cares for, everything he has made, even to the last sparrow."³¹⁰ Calvin understood that human beings "are not our own" but that "we belong to God."³¹¹ For Calvin, the primary purpose of the Christian life is to love and serve God and one's neighbor.

Calvin was a staunch defender of predestination. In his 1559 version of the *Institutes of Christian Religion*, Calvin defined predestination as "God's eternal decree, by which he determined with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others."³¹²

As Margit Ernst-Habib notes, Calvin defended predestination out of "deep

³⁰⁸ Martin Luther, *The Gospel for the Sunday after Christmas, Luke 2:33-40*, quoted in Placher, "Every Work a Calling," 206.

³⁰⁹ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis 15-20*, 130.

³¹⁰ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book I, Ch. XVI(1), ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles; (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 197-198.

³¹¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, Ch. VII, (1), 689-690.

³¹² Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, Ch. XXI, (5), 926.

pastoral concern” for Christians.³¹³ By emphasizing that Christians were elected for salvation through the grace of Jesus Christ alone, not by their own efforts, Calvin sought to reassure Christians of God’s grace and compassion during a time in which Protestants “were facing dreadful difficulties, persecution, and even death all over Europe.”³¹⁴ Calvin viewed the calling of the elect as a call to service. Calvin also argued that since God alone knows who is elected for salvation, Christians should pray that all people may be saved.³¹⁵

The calling of the elect is closely associated with Calvin’s doctrine of vocation. Calvin spoke about two types of callings: (1) a “general call” to faith “by which God invites all equally to himself through the outward preaching of the word,” and (2) a “special” call from God to believers through which the Holy Spirit illuminates the hearts of the elect into faith.³¹⁶ Like Luther, Calvin believed that all Christians were called by God to live out a particular set of duties or “callings.” Calvin wrote:

the Lord bids each one of us in all life’s actions to look to his calling. For he knows with what great restlessness human nature flames, with what fickleness it is borne hither and thither, how its ambition longs to embrace various things at once. Therefore, lest through our stupidity and rashness everything be turned topsy-turvy, he has appointed duties for every man in his particular way of life. And that no one may thoughtlessly transgress his limits, he has named these various kinds of living “callings.”³¹⁷

Calvin believed that God honored every person’s callings and that “(n)o deed is

³¹³ Margit Ernst-Habib, “‘Chosen By Grace’ Reconsidering the Doctrine of Predestination,” in *Feminist and Womanist Essays in Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. Amy Plantinga Pauw and Serene Jones (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 85.

³¹⁴ Ernst-Habib, 86.

³¹⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, Ch. XXIII, (14), 964.

³¹⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, Ch. XXIV, (8), 974 and Placher, “Introduction to John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*,” 232.

³¹⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, Ch. X, (6), 724.

considered more noble” than others.³¹⁸ He encouraged Christians to live true to their divine calling even if doing so caused them distress. Calvin wrote:

The magistrate will discharge his functions more willingly; the head of the household will confine himself to his duty; each man will bear and swallow the discomforts, vexations, weariness, and anxieties in his way of life, when he has been persuaded that the burden was laid upon him by God.³¹⁹

Trusting in God’s providence, Calvin asserted that “no task will be so sordid and base” for God as long as it was truly your calling.”³²⁰

Calvin agreed with Luther that an individual should not “attempt more than his calling will permit” or leave the station in life God has assigned to him.³²¹ Calvin differed from Luther in the sense that Calvin allowed for more flexibility. He believed that people could change professions if doing so would greater glorify God or more effectively serve one’s neighbor.³²² For Calvin, when everyone lives true to his or her calling, society will be at peace. He writes:

“The best way, therefore, to maintain a peaceful life is when each one is intent upon the duties of his own calling, carries out the commands which the Lord has given, and devotes himself to these tasks; when the farmer is busy with the work of cultivation, the workman carries on his trade, and in this way each keeps within his proper limits. As soon as men turn aside from this, everything is thrown into confusion and disorder.”³²³

While Luther and Calvin advanced notions of vocation that highlight the invaluable role every Christian plays in serving God and gives every person a life purpose, their understandings of vocation are not without critique. Three important

³¹⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, Ch. X, (6), 724.

³¹⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, Ch. X, (6), 725.

³²⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, Ch. X, (6), 725.

³²¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, Ch. X, (6), 725.

³²² Joan C. Martin, “Between Vocation and Work: A Womanist Notion of a Work Ethic,” in *Feminist and Womanist Essays in Reformed Dogmatics*, 179.

³²³ John Calvin, *Commentary on 1 Thess. 4.11* quoted in Walchenbach, “Vocation,” in *The Westminster Handbook to Reformed Theology*, 231.

issues include: (1) the impact these theologies of vocation had on limiting the social mobility of most people; (2) how these perspectives failed to account for the dehumanizing possibilities of human labor; and, (3) the way in which these notions of vocation limited opportunities for women.

First, in terms of social mobility, both Luther and Calvin defended the existing social hierarchy as a creation of God. Douglas Schuurman observes that Luther and Calvin actually conferred “*theological legitimacy* upon the authority of persons occupying positions of power within the social order. Parents, princes, employers, teachers, pastors, and judges represent in their offices not themselves, but God.”³²⁴ In fact, Calvin believed that God uses our callings to ensure that we do not “thoughtlessly transgress” our limits or turn everything “topsy-turvey.”³²⁵

Luther’s response to the German Peasants’ War in 1525 demonstrates his willingness to defend the social hierarchy at any cost. In March 1525, peasants in Memmingen published *Twelve Articles* in which they defended their right to use violence to achieve social reform.³²⁶ In response, Luther published *Admonition to Peace* in which he urged the authorities to take the peasants’ concerns seriously but also warned the peasants against fighting.³²⁷ Luther disagreed with the peasants that all people were equal writing: “A worldly kingdom cannot exist without an inequality of person, some being free, some imprisoned, some lords, some subjects, etc.”³²⁸ When fighting broke

³²⁴ Schuurman, 104. Italics in the original.

³²⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, Ch. X, (6), 724.

³²⁶ Charles M. Jacobs, rev. Robert C. Schultz, “Introduction to Admonition to Peace a Reply to The Twelve Articles of the Peasants in Swabia,” in *Luther’s Works*, 46:6.

³²⁷ Jacobs, 7-8.

³²⁸ Martin Luther, “Admonition to Peace, A Reply to the Twelve Articles of The Peasants in Swabia,” trans. Charles M. Jacobs. Trans. Robert C. Schultz; vol. 3 of *Luther’s Works*, American ed., ed. Robert C. Schultz and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 39.

out, Luther strongly condemned the peasants and urged the authorities to squash the rebellion and in the end, over 100,000 people died.³²⁹

Secondly, Luther and Calvin did not comprehend how their notions of vocation and work could be used to justify dehumanizing work. Joan Martin, a womanist professor of Christian ethics, praises the reformers for giving “Western Christianity the first positive interpretation of work applicable to all persons in every socioeconomic, political, and occupational status” and “gave honor and dignity to all work diligently done.”³³⁰ But Martin argues that the two men seemed to “have little sense of the morality of the political economy,” or understand how work could be exploitive.³³¹ She writes “(r)ather than asking whether the economic relations themselves were just or unjust,” the two reformers assumed that economic activity could be controlled through individual moral restraint.³³² Further,

By upholding an unambiguously positive notion of work as vocation without criticizing the social relations of the changing political economy, the Protestant tradition was left with no theological or moral recourse for challenging exploitive work. Indeed, because there was virtually no notion of a “calling” to transform unjust human structures, despite the fact that such institutions were seen theologically as the result of the Fall into sin, little thought was given to the notion of the social structuring of work. Vocation remained abstracted from the material conditions of life and systems of exploitation.³³³

The way in which these notions of vocation were later used to defend capitalism will be discussed later.

Thirdly, while Luther’s and Calvin’s commitment to the priesthood of all

³²⁹ Martin Marty, *Martin Luther* (New York: Penguin Group, 2004), 98.

³³⁰ Martin, 177.

³³¹ Martin, 180.

³³² Martin, 180. Martin quotes from Robert Wuthnow to make this point. See Robert Wuthnow, *Poor Richard’s Principle: Recovering the American Dream through the Moral Dimensions of Work, Business, and Money* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 59.

³³³ Martin, 181.

believers theoretically justified expanding vocational opportunities for women, both men failed to question their patriarchal views and legitimated the secondary status of women.³³⁴ Luther narrowly defined the proper vocation for women to being submissive wives and loving mothers.³³⁵ Luther believed that God commanded men and women to marry and have children.³³⁶ In addition, Luther expected wives to be submissive to their husbands and offered little relief for women in unhappy marriages. He wrote:

“It is the highest, most valuable treasure that a woman can have to be subject to a man and certain that her works are pleasing to him. What could be happier for her? Therefore, if she wants to be a Christian wife, she should think: I won’t mind what kind of husband I have, whether he is a heathen or a Jew, pious or evil. I will think instead that God has put me in marriage and I will be subject and obedient to my husband. For all of her works are golden when she is obedient.”³³⁷

As Jane Dempsey Douglass observes, while Luther acknowledged the risks associated with childbirth, he also said that in childbirth, women were fulfilling their true vocation.³³⁸

³³⁴ The Reformation had positive and negative implications for women. Jane Dempsey Douglass notes three positive changes: (1) the establishment of civil laws which prevented some marital abuses; (2) increased access to education for young women who needed to read Scripture; and, (3) the creation of the clergy wife position which offered some women limited leadership roles in society. Jane Dempsey Douglass, “Women and the Continental Reformation,” in *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Tradition*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 292-318. However, Kirsi Stjerna notes that the Reformation’s focus on rational interpretation of the Word over charismatic religious experience silenced mystics, many of whom were women, while closing the convents denied cloistered women access to education, opportunities for financial independence and property ownership. Kirsi Stjerna, *Women and the Reformation* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2009), 11-31.

³³⁵ Stjerna, 34-35. Merry Wiesner suggests that Luther views about women were not favorable. While Luther claimed that women were created by God and saved through faith, he also described them as weak creatures who possessed the power to bewitch men and characterized women who did not live up to his ideals as tools of the Devil. Merry Wiesner, “Luther and Women: The Death of Two Marys,” in *Feminist Theology: A Reader*, ed. Ann Loades (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990), 123-143.

³³⁶ Douglass, “Women and the Continental Reformation,” 295-296. While Luther declared that marriage was not a sacrament, he had high regard for the institution. Luther encouraged former priests and nuns to marry and in 1525, he married a former nun named Katharina von Bora. For more information, see Stjerna, 33-35.

³³⁷ Martin Luther, *D. [sic] Martin Luthers [sic] sämmtliche [sic] Werke*. 51,428 (Erlangen and Frankfurt, 1826-57), quoted in Wiesner, “Luther and Women,” 126-127.

³³⁸ Douglass, “Women and the Continental Reformation,” 295.

Calvin shared Luther's views regarding the calling for women was that of a spouse and mother.³³⁹ Calvin viewed marriage as God's chosen lifestyle, women as inferior to men and wives as submissive to husbands because it was ordained by God and our natural disposition as human beings.³⁴⁰ Douglass discusses how Calvin had little compassion for women in abusive and potentially deadly relationships.³⁴¹

Contemporary feminist theologians L. DeAne Lagerquist and Caryn D. Riswold are critical of Luther for failing to identify patriarchy as a sin that distorts all human institutions, including the church, and his inability to acknowledge how it limits women's vocational options.³⁴² They criticize Gustaf Wingren for perpetuating patriarchy by using the master-serf metaphor to describe Luther's understanding of the God-human relationship because this metaphor denies human beings any meaningful sense of agency. While women found creative ways to engage their Christian vocation as clergy wives, preachers, writers and teachers over the years, it was not until the 20th century that women received the right to ordination in most mainline Protestant denominations. Even today, some denominations refuse to ordain women as church officers or clergy.

³³⁹ Calvin was also highly critical of the female sex who he characterized as sexual temptresses who led men astray. He called women vain, frivolous and mentally incompetent. See William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 52-54. However, Jane Dempsey Douglas observes that Calvin's understanding of Christian freedom seemed to suggest a potential role for women as church leaders. Calvin understood three levels of Christian freedom: (1) freedom from the law through the grace of Christ; (2) freedom of conscience through which we willingly obey God's law; and, (3) freedom in indifferent matters or things that God allows us to do but that we should refrain from doing to avoid offending others. Calvin identified Paul's restrictions on women speaking in church and his admonition that they cover their heads in church as indifferent matters. In this sense, Calvin indicated that these restrictions against women were culturally conditioned and could be changed according to the needs or dictates of society. For more information, see Douglass, *Women, Freedom and Calvin* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985).

³⁴⁰ Bouwsma, 76-77, 136.

³⁴¹ Douglass, "Women and the Continental Reformation," 301.

³⁴² L. DeAne Lagerquist and Caryn D. Riswold, "Historical and Theological Legacies of Feminism and Lutheranism," in *Transformative Lutheran Theologies: Feminist, Womanist, and Mujerista Perspectives*, ed. Mary J. Streufert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 15-30.

Vocation and the Birth of the Protestant Work Ethic

As the Reformation swept across Western Europe, Christians began to consider the implications of the new theology of vocation in their daily lives. As new Christian communities formed through the “radical Reformation,” other ideas about Christian vocation emerged.³⁴³ Puritanism and Calvinism significantly influenced the understanding of Christian vocation and work in England and the United States. Bennethum observes that Puritans and other Calvinists twisted Luther’s belief that God calls Christians “*in their occupations*” to serve God and neighbor into the belief that “God calls people *to* their occupations.”³⁴⁴ This was a significant shift. Christian vocation became defined as one’s responsibility to work hard in one’s God-given occupation and Christians began to interpret financial success as evidence of God’s favor which ultimately resulted in the creation of the American Protestant work ethic.³⁴⁵

Martin traces the birth of an American secular work ethic and the role Calvinism played in this process. She reminds us that the Puritans arrived in the British colonies only 70 years after Calvin transformed Geneva into a model Christian city.³⁴⁶ In these colonies, Puritan theology and values such as frugality, diligence and stewardship reigned and in time, the religious and civic nature of vocation merged.³⁴⁷

Martin quotes James B. Gilbert who observes that by the 19th century, the term work ethic had come to represent “a complex ethical statement of the interrelationship between the individual, what he or she produced, and society. It represented an ideal

³⁴³ Placher, “Every Work a Calling,” 208.

³⁴⁴ Bennethum, 55. Italics in the original.

³⁴⁵ Bennethum, 55.

³⁴⁶ Martin, 181.

³⁴⁷ Martin, 181.

situation in which individuals received, not just payment, but ethical and aesthetic enrichment for their work as well.”³⁴⁸ Martin adds: “Embedded in this ideal work ethic were biblical, Reformation, and Puritan notions of work as manual labor, craft, and mercantile entrepreneurship.”³⁴⁹ Vocation was now limited to one’s job or work.

Contemporary Christian Insights on Vocation

Contemporary Christian theologians continue this conversation about the relationship between vocation and work. Many are reluctant to limit Christian vocation to one’s work due numerous social, cultural and economic changes. First, with the birth of industrialism and the success of capitalism, the nature of work has changed significantly. For many individuals, work is not creative or rewarding but rather “repetitive, boring, competitive” due to the modern assembly line, the birth of new technology and the demands of industry.³⁵⁰ And, for many people, working conditions are often dangerous and dehumanizing.

While factory workers and others struggle to find meaning in monotonous and sometimes dead end jobs, Christians in supervisory positions struggle with how to live out their vocation or job without contributing to the dehumanization of their employees or others. As Schuurman notes, some forms of human labor actually lead to the exploitation of other people, exacerbate poverty and perpetuate of class divisions.³⁵¹

In addition, Bennethum observes that with the success of capitalism, many

³⁴⁸ James B. Gilbert, *Work without Salvation: America’s Intellectual and Industrial Alienation, 1880-1990* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), viii-ix quoted in Martin, “Between Vocation and Work,” 182.

³⁴⁹ Martin, 182.

³⁵⁰ Schuurman, 8.

³⁵¹ Schuurman, 8.

Americans now to link their self-worth with their occupation.³⁵² This brings a myriad of complications. For instance, when a person's identity and worth is tied to his or her career, it is easy for people to become workaholics who no longer have time for their families, church or community obligations.³⁵³ Or, when people lose their jobs, they struggle with feelings of inadequacy due to their unemployed status. And, if vocation is simply one's job, what does this mean for people who are underemployed or retired or forced to take unrewarding jobs? The implication is that these people are not as worthy as others or have no vocation.

Another significant change is that secularism and the privatization of religion have made it easier for Christians to separate their faith from their work.³⁵⁴ Religious faith is now a private affair and an inappropriate conversation topic in the workplace. The increase in religious pluralism perpetuates this silence as colleagues keep their religious views to themselves rather than offending co-workers who may belong to different religious traditions.³⁵⁵ Finally, the success of consumerism has also shifted priorities. Work is now seen as a means to afford a middle class lifestyle rather than as a way to live a life of purpose.

Jacques Ellul argues that vocation and work are not the same thing and that work has no religious significance.³⁵⁶ Ellul writes: "nothing in the Bible allows us to identify *work* with *calling*. When the terms that can be translated by the word 'vocation' or 'call

³⁵² Bennethum, 25.

³⁵³ Bennethum, 26.

³⁵⁴ Bennethum, 28.

³⁵⁵ Bennethum, 28-29.

³⁵⁶ Jacques Ellul, "Work and Calling," in *Callings!* ed. James Y. Holloway and Will D. Campbell (New York: Paulist Press, 1974) 19. Italics in the original. Both Placher and Schuurman highlight Ellul's critique of equating vocation with work. See Placher, "Christian Callings in a Post-Christian World," 328 and Schuurman, 83.

from God' are encountered, they are always concerned with a summons to a specific service of God."³⁵⁷ Christian ethicist Stanley Hauerwas criticizes Pope John Paul II for suggesting that God made human beings co-creators, denies that work has any religious importance and writes:

Our work does not have to have or contribute to some grand plan; its blessings are of a more mundane sort. Work gives us the means to survive, be of service to others, and perhaps most of all, work gives us a way to stay busy. For while work may not be ultimately fulfilling, it is at least a great gift—a hedge against boredom. Attributing greater significance to work risks making it demonic as work then becomes an idolatrous activity through which we try to secure and guarantee our significance, to make “our mark” on history.³⁵⁸

Other contemporary theologians write to redeem the more inclusive concept of Christian vocation. Schuurman offers a strong defense of vocation as conceived by Luther and Calvin and identifies four criteria for judging the acceptability of one's vocation. First, he suggests that the primary calling for all Christians is to serve God, neighbor and the common good; thus, all authentic vocations involve such service.³⁵⁹ Second, all authentic Christian callings express Christian love so “(a)ny obligation of one's work, political life, or any other relational field that violates Christian love must be rejected as contrary to Christian vocation.”³⁶⁰ Third, authentic Christian vocation is oriented towards ushering in God's shalom or God's vision of justice, equality, peace, wholeness and fullness of life.³⁶¹ And fourth, Christian vocation requires individuals to

³⁵⁷ Ellul, 19. Italics in the original.

³⁵⁸ Stanley Hauerwas, “Work as Co-Creation: A Critique of a Remarkably Bad Idea,” in *Co-Creation and Capitalism: John Paul II's Laborem Exercens*, ed. John W. Houck and Oliver F. Williams (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), 48. Bother Placher and Schuurman quote Haurwas. See Placher, 328-329 and Schuurman, 84.

³⁵⁹ Schuurman, 78-79.

³⁶⁰ Schuurman, 79.

³⁶¹ Schuurman, 79- 81.

discern if their callings live up to these Christian ideals of service, love and shalom.³⁶²

Frederick Buechner is probably one of the most quoted theologians regarding Christian vocation. He writes: “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”³⁶³ He offers a simple rule to determine which of the many voices calling to you is the voice of God: “The kind of work God usually calls you to is the kind of work (a) that you need most to do and (b) that the world most needs to have done.”³⁶⁴

James W. Fowler invites Christians to understand that our calling as human beings is to work in partnership with God to seek the liberation of God’s created world.³⁶⁵ In other words, Fowler writes about “a Christian understanding of the *human* vocation” rather than about a more narrow understanding of Christian vocation.³⁶⁶ Fowler’s offers the following definition:

Vocation is the response a person makes with his or her total self to the address of God and to the calling to partnership. The shaping of vocation as a total response of the self to the address of God involves the orchestration of our leisure, our relationships, our work, our private life, our public life, and the resources we steward, so as to put it all at the disposal of God’s purposes in the services of God and the neighbor.³⁶⁷

Fowler rejects the more limited understanding of vocation as one’s job or career.

He notes that “(o)ne’s career may be expressive of one’s vocation, but it is not

³⁶² Schuurman, 81-82. While defending this classic understanding of Christian vocation, Schuurman indicates three ways in which the Protestant notion of vocation has been abused: (1) some Christians use vocation to justify idolatry to work; (2) others use vocation to privilege love of one’s family or self over one’s neighbor; and, (3) Christian vocation has been used to support injustice and to perpetuate social hierarchies and patriarchy. For more information, see Schuurman, 82-116.

³⁶³ Frederick Buechner, “Vocation,” in *Leading Lives That Matter: What We Should Do and Who We Should Be*, ed. Mark R. Schwehn and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 112.

³⁶⁴ Buechner, 112.

³⁶⁵ James W. Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian: Adult Development and Christian Faith*, Revised ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 74-75.

³⁶⁶ Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian*, 75. Italics in the original.

³⁶⁷ Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian*, 77. Italics in the original.

necessarily identical with it.”³⁶⁸ Fowler emphasizes that human beings are called to community and that each of us is responsible for ensuring that every community member has the ability to live to his or her fullest potential. Fowler is critical of self-actualization theories that focus on self-development and ignore our responsibility to serve God and others. He writes that while people living out their vocation may experience personal fulfillment, this “is a by-product of faithful response to the faithful love of God.”³⁶⁹

Fowler identifies a number of benefits of understanding vocation in this way. When we understand that God calls each person to pursue a particular vocational path, we are freed from competing against others for prestige, relieved of the concern that someone else may fulfill our destiny and we can celebrate the vocational journeys of others.³⁷⁰ Further, people living in vocation are able to honor their limits and live a more balanced life.³⁷¹ Fowler calls upon the Christian community to encourage young people to live a counter-cultural life in which they use their gifts, passions and creativity to heal the world’s brokenness and to serve God and neighbor.³⁷²

Brian J. Mahan agrees with Fowler that a life lived in vocation is a counter-cultural one and suggests that we see vocation is “a counterplayer to ambition.”³⁷³ In this sense, vocation is an invitation to live an unscripted life rather than to live according to the dominant script of individual professional achievement and success.³⁷⁴ He writes: “Vocation speaks to a gracious discovery of a kind of interior consonance between our

³⁶⁸ Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian*, 76.

³⁶⁹ Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian*, 83.

³⁷⁰ Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian*, 83-84.

³⁷¹ Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian*, 84.

³⁷² Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian*, 117.

³⁷³ Brian J. Mahan, *Forgetting Ourselves on Purpose: Vocation and the Ethics of Ambition* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 9.

³⁷⁴ Mahan, 10.

deepest desires and hopes and our unique gifts, as they are summoned forth by the needs of others and realized in response to that summons.”³⁷⁵

Mahan suggests that many people resist engaging in a vocational journey because we are afraid that when we acknowledge our accommodation to social scripts, we will discover a world devoid of meaning.³⁷⁶ Our blind adherence to these scripts of power, wealth and fame often lead to personal alienation and diminish our capacity for compassion whereas, “life conceived as vocation” is a “life increasingly given over to compassion for self, others, and the world.”³⁷⁷

Mahan uses the phrase “remember and resist” to advocate that we engage in “practices of formative remembering and spiritual indirection.”³⁷⁸ Practices of formative remembering help us remember times when we have been moved to compassion while spiritual indirection refers to practices that help us see why we resist taking the steps necessary to live in vocation. Mahan encourages us to engage in these practices so that we may relinquish our attachment to ambition and live our authentic vocations.

Parker J. Palmer encourages us to see vocation “as a gift to be received.”³⁷⁹ He writes: “Vocation does not come from a voice “out there” calling me to become something I am not. It comes from a voice from “in here” calling me to be the person I was born to be, to fulfill the original selfhood given to me at birth by God.”³⁸⁰

Palmer suggests that “(w)e find our callings by claiming authentic selfhood” and

³⁷⁵ Mahan, 10-11.

³⁷⁶ Mahan, 43-44.

³⁷⁷ Mahan, 13.

³⁷⁸ Mahan, 152, 161.

³⁷⁹ Parker J. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 10.

³⁸⁰ Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*, 10.

answering the questions “Who am I? What is my nature?”³⁸¹ He invites us to uncover what Thomas Merton called our true self by listening to our life:

Before I can tell my life what I want to do with it, I must listen to my life telling me who I am. I must listen for the truths and values at the heart of my own identity, not the standards by which I *must* live-but the standards by which I cannot help but live if I am living my own life.³⁸²

Palmer challenges us to live our authentic life in the face of social forces such as racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination that may try to stop us. He reminds us that leaders of successful liberation movements are men and women like Rosa Parks who make the decision to “live divided no more.”³⁸³ In other words, “*(t)hey decide no longer to act on the outside in a way that contradicts some truth about themselves that they hold deeply on the inside.*”³⁸⁴ Likewise, these individuals have learned how to overcome internalized oppression.

Palmer also encourages us to acknowledge our limits, to take self-care seriously and to own our shadow. Failure to do so will result in harm to self and harm to others and lead to burnout. This includes examining our motivations for pursuing a particular vocation. For example, he suggests that we should not engage in justice work out of a misplaced sense of what one ought to do. And he invites us to help one another to discern and live out our authentic vocations so that together, we may transform the world.

Palmer has been criticized by Gary Babcock and Schuurman for focusing too much on vocation as self-fulfillment. I believe that Babcock and Schuurman are too hard on Palmer. While Palmer does say that embracing one’s vocation starts with honoring

³⁸¹ Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*, 15.

³⁸² Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*, 4-5. Italics in the original.

³⁸³ Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*, 32.

³⁸⁴ Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*, 32. Italics in the original.

one's true self, he also writes that "(t)rue vocation joins self with service."³⁸⁵ Palmer reminds us that when we engage the existential question "Who am I?," we will necessarily engage the question "Whose am I?" because the self is always a self-in-relation to others.³⁸⁶ We can only "embody the great commandment to love my neighbor and myself" by understanding, honoring and loving both the self and our community.³⁸⁷

Schuurman adds two other critiques of Palmer's understanding of vocation. First, he challenges Palmer's assertion that God speaks to us internally and suggests that many people hear the voice of God from external sources. It is my sense that Schuurman misunderstands Palmer. While Palmer does emphasize the need for people to listen to the voice of God within, he does not explicitly reject the belief that God speaks to us externally. Palmer's point is to emphasize our tendency to give more authority to these external voices than our own and to describe how doing so often leads to self-alienation.

Secondly, Schuurman argues that Palmer's celebration of the true self is at odds with Luther and Calvin who believed that sin distorts the self and how we live in relation to others. It is my sense that Palmer is not suggesting that the self is not sinful. In fact, Palmer may call our tendency to privilege the voices of others over our own a sin. And, while Schuurman places emphasis on individual sin, he underestimates the power of systemic sin such as racism and sexism to erode the self-confidence of men and women who hear and internalize these oppressive messages.

In addition, Schuurman and Palmer either emphasize different aspects of the Divine or hold different notions of the nature of God. Palmer writes as a Quaker who

³⁸⁵ Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*, 16.

³⁸⁶ Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*, 17.

³⁸⁷ Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*, 17.

affirms that there is the light of God within every person while Schuurman writes as a Lutheran who focuses on the transcendent, providential nature of God. While I believe that God is both transcendent and imminent, a lot of damage has been done to women through the ages by our tendency to concentrate on God's transcendent nature and our implicit acceptance of hierarchy and patriarchy.

Sharon Daloz Parks writes about the link between vocation and faith. Parks writes that “(v)*ocation* conveys ‘calling’ and meaningful purpose” and the sense that we are called to use our gifts to attend to the concerns of both oneself and the world.³⁸⁸ Thus, vocation “gives rise to moments of power when self and purpose become aligned with eternity.”³⁸⁹ Further, when faith is understood as the act of making meaning, faith is tied to vocation or the “awareness of living one’s life aligned with a larger frame of purpose and significance.”³⁹⁰

Before considering how insights from other religious traditions or secular sources can deepen our understanding of vocation as living a meaningful life, I would like to make several observations about this conversation on vocation. I agree that it is imperative that we return to a comprehensive understanding of Christian vocation as how one lives one’s entire life in service to God and neighbor. This includes how we relate to our family members, friends, neighbors and larger community and how we use our God-given gifts, talents and resources to work together to promote God’s vision of shalom.

At the same time, many of the authors discussed so far write from places of social privilege. It is my sense that some underestimate the power of racism, sexism,

³⁸⁸ Parks, 148. Italics in the original.

³⁸⁹ Parks, 148.

³⁹⁰ Parks, 26.

homophobia, classism and other forms of discrimination to inhibit the ability of every person to live in vocation. It is easy for Palmer and others to write that individuals who come from marginalized communities must learn to reject social messages that imply their inferiority but it is much more difficult for many of these individuals to do so. And the reality is that some individuals, including many women, receive these messages from a variety of sources including from their own families and their ethnic and religious communities.

In terms of young adults, the values possessed by particular ethnic communities can make it difficult for college students to pursue their own vocational ambitions. Bob H. Suzuki describes the tendency for some Asian American parents to pressure their children to enter into prestigious, high paying careers and in these families where patriarchy is deeply honored, it is difficult for young people to resist this pressure.³⁹¹ Other young adults of color must wrestle with embracing their racial identity in a racist society and on predominantly white campuses. These extra pressures add a layer of personal psychological growth that these young people must experience even as they engage in the process of discerning their vocation.

Second, I take issue with Fowler and others who suggest that living a self-actualized life is a by-product of living in vocation. Again, for many women, a key challenge they face when considering how to live a meaningful life is learning to honor and tend to their own lives even as they serve their spouses, children, parents or extended family members. For many of these women, learning to see themselves as a beloved,

³⁹¹ Bob H. Suzuki, "Revisiting the Model Minority Stereotype: Implications for Student Affairs Practice and Higher Education," *New Directions for Student Services*, no. 97 (Spring 2002): 21-32. Accessed March 30, 2013, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/ss.36>.

gifted child of God capable of living a meaningful life is their primary vocational goal. I also caution us from assuming that every person has the gifts of time or energy to engage in acts of discernment to uncover their true self and to consider how to live with integrity to this self. For example, a single mother working several jobs to feed her children and pay her bills may use all her energy simply trying to make ends meet.

Feminist, womanist and other scholars are developing ways to talk about vocation with women and men in marginalized communities. For example, Martin uses the experiences of African American slave women to develop “an enslaved women’s work ethic” that can support contemporary African American women in their quest for personal freedom, liberation and fulfillment.³⁹² She invites women to draw on their womanist notions of moral authority to build solidarity and to empower African American women to take control of their use of their own labor and to take pride in their work. Alicia Vargas writes about her struggle as Latina to find a pastoral call in the Lutheran church using insights from *mujerista* theology.³⁹³ Vargas describes how she identifies with the suffering of Christ as she confronts oppressive systems. She reminds us that in his death and resurrection, Christ restored full humanity to both the oppressed and the oppressor. It is this realization that empowers her to work for justice, peace and equality in the midst of her daily suffering.³⁹⁴

Other Insights On Vocation

Thich Nhat Hanh, a Buddhist monk, teacher, peace activist and author, writes about living a life of meaning from his perspective as an Engaged Buddhist. Thich Nhat

³⁹² Martin, 187-188.

³⁹³ Alicia Vargas, “Through Mujerista Eyes: Stories of Incarnate Redemption,” in *Transformative Lutheran Theologies*, 99-106.

³⁹⁴ Vargas, 104.

Hanh developed the concept of Engaged Buddhism while living in Vietnam in the early 1950's during the war between the French and the Vietnamese Resistance Movement.³⁹⁵

He defines Engaged Buddhism as “a kind of Buddhism that responds to anything happening in the here and now.”³⁹⁶

Thich Nhat Hanh teaches that we can practice Engaged Buddhism through mindfulness which he describes as the art of “keeping one’s consciousness alive to the present reality.”³⁹⁷ We learn the art of living mindfully by engaging in practices of concentration such as focusing on one’s breathing or engaging in sitting or walking meditation. Just about any human activity can be engaged mindfully because it is the intention that we bring to the act and not the act itself that matters.

Thich Nhat Hanh has developed Fourteen Precepts of Engaged Buddhism which offer a clear vision of how a person can live a life of deep awareness and purpose. One precept is dedicated to right livelihood. He writes: “Do not live with a vocation that is harmful to humans and nature. Do not invest in companies that deprive others of their chance to live. Select a vocation that helps realize your ideal of compassion.”³⁹⁸

Thich Nhat Hanh discusses right livelihood as both an individual and collective responsibility. He notes that “(t)he way that you support yourself can be an expression of your deepest self, or it can be a source of suffering for you and others.”³⁹⁹ While individuals should try to work in jobs that do not harm others, we as a society have the

³⁹⁵ Thich Nhat Hanh, “Definition of Engaged Buddhism,” August 27, 2009. Accessed September 25, 2012, <http://www.plumvillage.org/video/143-definition-of-engaged-buddhism.html>.

³⁹⁶ Thich Nhat Hanh, “Definition.”

³⁹⁷ Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness: An Introduction to the Practice of Meditation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), 11.

³⁹⁸ Thich Nhat Hanh, “The Fourteen Precepts of Engaged Buddhism” from *Interbeing*. Accessed September 25, 2012, http://viewonbuddhism.org/resources/14_precepts.html.

³⁹⁹ Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of the Buddha’s Teaching: Transforming Suffering Into Peace, Joy and Liberation* (New York: Broadway Books, 1998), 113.

collective responsibility of ensuring the creation of enough good jobs. He observes that many people are forced to take jobs that harm others because our economic and political leaders refuse to discuss how to make meaningful changes while individual members of society refuse to make lifestyle changes that would reduce the level of suffering in the world.

Bo Lozoff draws upon the wisdom of the world's philosophical and spiritual traditions to encourage his readers to live meaningful lives.⁴⁰⁰ Lozoff believes that these traditions share three central ideas:

1. Something sacred, truly holy, and incomprehensible does exist.
2. This sacred reality can be touched directly by each of us, in our depths.
3. The quest to touch that reality is the primary purpose of life. If we do not touch the sacred, we will "have done nothing."⁴⁰¹

He suggests that at the heart of all religious or wisdom traditions lie two basic spiritual principles: the principle of Communion through which we seek union with "the Divine Essence deep within us" by engaging in inner contemplation; and, the principle of Community through which we move beyond ourselves to love, respect, forgive and serve others.⁴⁰²

Lozoff writes about call. He notes that all human beings really have the same basic purpose: "(t)o live in a way that benefits rather than harms; to live in a way, however humble or exalted, that glorifies and uplifts creation."⁴⁰³ He argues that each of us must decide if we are going to follow this universal call and that once we make the decision to live for others, we will be able to discern our passions, callings and talents

⁴⁰⁰ Bo Lozoff, *It's a Meaningful Life: It Just Takes Practice* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000).

⁴⁰¹ Lozoff, 2-3.

⁴⁰² Lozoff, 5-6.

⁴⁰³ Lozoff, 168.

and how we can use these things to serve the world.⁴⁰⁴ He reminds us that all of the world's religions teach "that we are all intentional elements of God's creation and we were put here for a purpose in keeping with our talents, energy, and circumstances."⁴⁰⁵

When considering a particular job, Lozoff invites us to consider two basic questions: "1. Is this a good fit for me? and 2. Do I believe it benefits the world?"⁴⁰⁶ He also encourages us to think about our vocation in broader terms. Sometimes, our paid work may only be things we do to support ourselves while we engage in our real vocation such as, in his case, engaging in prison ministry. In the end, the mark of a good person is not one's choice of career but rather the character and virtues we choose to live by.

Gregg Levoy, a former journalist and professor of journalism, writes about call as a business and educational consultant.⁴⁰⁷ Levoy draws upon the wisdom of numerous religious and spiritual writers such as Frederick Buechner, Joseph Campbell, Jack Kornfield and Thomas Merton and psychologists such as William James, Scott Peck and Carl Jung to talk about why and how individuals can live a purposeful life. Levoy points out that many of the world's traditions include some notion of call as a summons to "a new level of awareness, into a sacred frame of mind, into communion with that which is bigger than themselves."⁴⁰⁸ He deals with the question of who is calling by suggesting it does not matter if we refer to the caller as "God, the Patterning Intelligence, the Design Mind, the Unconscious, the Soul, the Force of Completion, the Center Court, or simply

⁴⁰⁴ Lozoff, 169.

⁴⁰⁵ Lozoff, 170.

⁴⁰⁶ Lozoff, 176.

⁴⁰⁷ Gregg Levoy, *Callings: Finding and Following an Authentic Life* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1997).

⁴⁰⁸ Levoy, 2.

‘life’s longing for itself’ as Kahlil Gibran envisioned.”⁴⁰⁹ Rather, what really matters is that human beings are in fact called to live an awakened life by some force and we must affirmatively respond to this call if we wish to live an authentic life.⁴¹⁰

Levoy admits that living into this awareness that our life has meaning can be both inspirational and paralyzing.⁴¹¹ Nevertheless, he encourages us to engage in acts of discernment such as prayer, contemplation and meditation to identify our call. He also encourages the use of communal discernment practices such as a Clearance Committee and reliance on mentors, therapists, pastors, friends or others to help us discern our call and walk with us as we struggle to respond.

Levoy also writes about paying attention to signs, stories and synchronicities that may help us discern the authenticity of our call. Drawing upon Jung, Levoy writes that

synchronicities mirror deep psychological processes, carry messages the way dreams do, and take on meaning and provide guidance to the degree that they correspond to emotional states and inner experiences—to thoughts, feelings, visions, dreams and premonitions.⁴¹²

Likewise, it is important that we acknowledge what Jung calls our shadow, or those qualities in ourselves that we dislike, and try to make this shadow useful rather than allowing it to take over our lives.⁴¹³ While Levoy acknowledges that following one’s call may require change or involve risk or sacrifice, failure to follow our call can lead to restlessness, depression and self-alienation. Finally, he observes that following our true calling will not necessarily lead to a life of prestige or fortune but lead to “an

⁴⁰⁹ Levoy, 2.

⁴¹⁰ Levoy, 2.

⁴¹¹ Levoy, 4-5.

⁴¹² Levoy, 110.

⁴¹³ Levoy, 175.

unspectacular life, a life of quiet ministry.”⁴¹⁴

Mary Catherine Bateson, a professor of anthropology and English, draws upon the life stories of five women to suggest that individuals, and in particular, women compose their lives based on their unique life experiences and social contexts.⁴¹⁵ She argues that the traditional view of vocation as the one, true life path set out before us no longer rings true and that young people today are likely to change careers multiple times.⁴¹⁶ Instead, “we are engaged in the day-by-day process of self-invention” in situations of fluidity, change and uncertainty.⁴¹⁷

Bateson encourages us to use our creativity, friendships and relationships to compose a life of meaning. She explains how sexism and racism often make composing one’s life difficult, if not impossible. Bateson invites men and women alike to maintain complementary and interdependent relationships and “respect across difference” so that we may support one another to compose a meaningful life.⁴¹⁸

Reflections

Sharon Daloz Parks writes about the unique developmental tasks of young adults and in particular, college students. She argues that the key developmental task for young adults is to experience “the birth of critical awareness and the dissolution and recomposition of the meaning of self, other, world and ‘God.’”⁴¹⁹ College faculty, administrators, religious life directors, chaplains and other caring adults have a critical

⁴¹⁴ Levoy, 279.

⁴¹⁵ Mary Catherine Bateson, *Composing A Life* (New York: Grove Press, 1989).

⁴¹⁶ Bateson, 6, 17.

⁴¹⁷ Bateson, 28.

⁴¹⁸ Bateson, 96.

⁴¹⁹ Parks, 5.

role to play in the healthy development of our students. As Parks suggests, we must challenge our students to ask big questions that they might otherwise ignore because answering them would require them to confront painful realities about themselves and the world in which they live. Likewise, we must push these students to dream worthy vocational dreams.

In my experience as a campus religious life director, I have met young people like those students in Mahan's classes who have been seduced by the social scripts of ambition and achievement or who are feeling pressure from their parents to pursue particular careers and lifestyles. And yet, I have also met students who are actively working to resist these dominant social scripts in order to live with integrity to their values and beliefs. For example, Sophia, one of the young women included in this study, has been out of college since May 2010. She is currently working as a program director for a nonprofit organization that takes youth on adventure excursions as a form of experiential learning. While at college, Sophia was seriously considering attending medical school.

During our interview for this research project, it became clear that Sophia is struggling against the dominate social script of success as she considers her future career. Sophia talked about how she is looking for external validation for her chosen work. As she continued to talk, it became more clear that she was referring to how she has no interest in acquiring status labels or titles in front of her name or "doing what on paper looks like I'm this great person." Rather, Sophia is seeking to feel like she is making a positive influence on the world in her job as opposed to a detrimental one. She uses the words of a speech she heard at a friend's graduation to keep her on course. The main

point of this speech was “just don’t hurt the world. If you can find a way to do that in your job, you’ve succeeded.” She now sees that she does not need to try to save everyone but what is important for her is to find a job in which she feels that she is doing good for herself and those around her.

Stephanie is dealing with similar issues. Stephanie graduated in May 2011 with a degree in English and Comparative Literary Studies. During our interview, Stephanie described the pressure she felt from her parents to succeed. She noted that

all my life I’ve been taught that if I want something I have to go after it. Like all my life, like be a go-getter. You know like pursue this, pursue that, follow your dreams, make it happen, especially from my Dad. He’s always been one to like push me like do your best, be the best, you know, make sure that your best means you’re the best.

Since graduating, Stephanie has become involved with a non-denominational Christian church. As her faith deepens, she is struggling with competing messages. She notes “going to this new church has really showed me a different side of things where I ... never thought that I could allow God to have control and that’s a scary thing for me. To know that my big plans as great as they may be in a worldly sense might not be God’s plans for me.” After participating in worship leadership and doing her own reading, Stephanie is concerned about living according to God’s plans rather than her own. She said during our interview:

I feel like I want something more and this ministry has really showed me that ... I want God to use my life as much as He can you know and, like, I don’t wanna short change myself and I don’t wanna short change the people that I’m ... meant to touch, the people that I’m meant to bring to God and ... that’s been something that I have been grappling with. Like I still have my dreams, I still have my desires. I still want a comfortable life. ... I want to be financially secure. I want this, I want that, I want that. I’m like what if God doesn’t want that for me? Or, what if He has something different in store for me?

The theologians, spiritual writers and authors highlighted in this chapter can help students like Sophia and Stephanie understand how to live a life in vocation. Let me share a few of these insights. First, all of these theologians and writers speak about vocation as living for something larger than oneself. Some people may have the privilege of working in occupations that we find meaningful but living in vocation involves more than just one's job. Living a life in vocation means treating people with loving kindness and compassion and working with others to seek justice and serve the common good. This commitment may come from a person's religious or spiritual beliefs, faith in God, or notions of discipleship. But it may also come from other sources of wisdom including psychology, humanist secular theories and insights from personal life experience. Living in vocation is a life lived for others.

Secondly, living in vocation requires one to engage in acts of discernment to identify our core values and beliefs and to consider if our call will allow us to live with integrity to these commitments and our sense of self. Discernment practices also help individuals identify and set aside the social scripts of ambition and success and our own egos to pursue careers or civic or volunteer commitments that allow us to express creativity, compassion and empathy and to experience personal vitality and fulfillment. This includes looking closely at our true motivations for pursuing particular calls or vocations. We must ask questions such as: Am I really interested in helping others in this vocation or am I just trying to make myself feel better? Or am I trying to maintain power over others? Or am I responding to some sort of brokenness in myself that I am not willing to address?

Thirdly, living in vocation means honestly acknowledging our role in denying

others the opportunity to live their authentic vocations. As Thich Nhat Hanh notes, each of us must consider how our choice of profession, lifestyle choices and other commitments impact the ability of other people to live meaningful lives. Among the many questions students should consider include: Will I work for corporations, businesses or employers who perpetuate dehumanizing or dangerous working conditions for others? How do my decisions as a consumer perpetuate the exploitation of others? Do I perpetuate notions of privilege, racism and other forms of discrimination through my own beliefs and actions or lack of action? For those of us in positions of privilege, this includes examining how we may use our privilege to address inequities and injustice.

Fourth, these authors remind us that we must both identify and honor our gifts. It is sometimes very difficult for college students to actually identify and own their gifts. This may be because they do not consider personal qualities like empathy or creativity to be true strengths. The dominant message in our society today is that one's strengths are tied to one's intellectual abilities. In addition, some young adults have been conditioned to believe that talking about their gifts is an inappropriate expression of pride.

Fifth, these authors write about the need to recognize one's limits. As Palmer writes from his own personal experience, failure to honor one's limits can lead to depression or burnout. This also means exploring our shadow to identify what it is trying to say to us, and how we may transform this shadow. This is another important message many high achieving and overly committed college students need to learn. Many students feel pressure from parents, faculty, administrators and peers to engage in numerous curricular and co-curricular opportunities often at the cost of their physical and mental health. For many students, just simply sitting in quiet contemplation seems

foreign. And, yet, when I teach students different contemplative practices, they describe these experiences as truly personally healing and rewarding.

Finally, Luther and Calvin wrote about how each person can live an authentic vocation in whatever life situation we find ourselves. More recently, Bateson invites us to compose a meaningful life based on our unique life situations, relationships and experience. This includes always remaining open to new opportunities as we deal with the variety of interruptions that can significantly change our lives. In this sense, living a life in vocation requires us to live with intentionality, always remaining open to where the Spirit may lead us.

CHAPTER 4

SPIRITUALITY AND DISCERNMENT

Introduction

There is a sense that people in the United States today are hungry for authentic spirituality. Robert Wuthnow observes that the increased popularity in New Age spirituality, self help groups, addiction support groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous, spirituality centers, literature regarding the relationship between the self and spirituality and increased attention to spirituality in the secular world demonstrates a growing desire by many Americans to develop a vital, life affirming spirituality.⁴²⁰ Marjorie J. Thompson, author of *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*, identifies four cultural causes of this spiritual hunger: the failure of rationalism and science to adequately address our desire for a life of depth; the rapid birth of new technologies which has caused many people to feel a sense of social dislocation; the predominance of cultural values that fail to address our need for meaning; and, a pervading sense of fear in our society as we confront issues from drug violence to the destruction of the environment to war.⁴²¹

Bo Lozoff describes the problem in a different way. He writes that all of the major problems on our planet today can be traced to the fact that, “(h)uman life is very deep and our dominant modern lifestyle is not.”⁴²² Craig Dykstra is highly critical of

⁴²⁰ Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 2, 142.

⁴²¹ Marjorie J. Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005, 1995), 3.

⁴²² Bo Lozoff, *It's a Meaningful Life: It Just Takes Practice* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 137.

Christian faith communities for failing to adequately address this spiritual hunger.⁴²³

Quoting Dorothee Soelle's *Death By Bread Alone*, Dykstra reminds us that people need both their physical and spiritual hungers to be satisfied to live a meaningful life. Ben Campbell Johnson and Andrew Dreitcer, also concerned about the spiritual vitality of faith communities, write that the collapse of the American culture, "alternatively labeled postmodern, post-denominational, secular, or pluralistic, has created much of the shaking and quaking in the lives of women and men in congregations today" as "old certitudes about God, the nation, the family, and the future" have been lost.⁴²⁴

Many young adults express this desire for authentic spirituality. College students are interested in exploring spirituality when it is broadly defined as something distinct from religion. In this chapter, I examine the literature on spirituality and historical spiritual practices. I consider the role Christian spiritual practices play in helping people respond to their spiritual hunger. I consider how mindfulness within Engaged Buddhism and practices such as meditation, deep listening and mindful breathing help one to develop self-awareness and cultivate compassion for self and others. I end by discussing how we can use insights from these traditional religious or spiritual practices to support the spiritual formation of college students who may or may not identify as religious.

Understanding Spirituality

As the topic of spirituality becomes more popular in this country, scholars seek to define spirituality more clearly. Walter Principe offers a straightforward definition of

⁴²³ Craig Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices* (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 1999). See Dorothee Soelle, *Death by Bread Alone*, trans. D. L. Scheidt (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 3-4.

⁴²⁴ Ben Campbell Johnson and Andrew Dreitcer, *Beyond the Ordinary: Spirituality for Church Leaders* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 7.

spirituality as “those aspects of a person’s living a faith or commitment that concern his or her striving to attain the highest ideal or goal.”⁴²⁵ Frank Rogers, Jr. observes that the “word ‘spirituality’ can refer to virtually any process which in one way or another responds to human longings for wholeness, mystery, connectedness, or personal power.”⁴²⁶

Gerald May returns to the original definition of the word “spirit” in Judaism and Christianity to define spirituality in a broad sense. He observes that the word “spirit” means “life-force, the basic energy of being.”⁴²⁷ This spirit or basic life force inspires human beings as we seek our community, make decisions and engage our creativity.⁴²⁸ Thus, for May

spirituality has to do with the fundamental connecting and propelling forces of our lives, our most profound passions, our most ultimate concerns. Spirituality is the wellspring of our sense of meaning and of our will to live. It is the source of our deepest loves, values, yearnings, and hopes. It intimately affects every part of our lives: emotions, relationships, work, and everything else we consider meaningful.⁴²⁹

May emphasizes that spirituality is grounded in every day human experience and that every person has a spiritual life that compels us to live for more.⁴³⁰ He writes: “The spiritual life is like a deep ocean current, often unseen but flowing through all our experience, moving us to seek connectedness and fulfillment, impelling us toward truth,

⁴²⁵ Walter Principe, “Towards Defining Spirituality,” in *Exploring Christian Spirituality: An Ecumenical Reader*, ed. Kenneth J. Collins (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 51.

⁴²⁶ Frank Rogers, Jr., “Dancing With Grace: Toward a Spirit-Centered Education,” *Religious Education* 89, no. 3 (Summer 1994), 381.

⁴²⁷ Gerald May, “Contemplative Spiritual Formation: An Introduction,” Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation, Bethesda, MD. n.d. [2].

⁴²⁸ May, [2].

⁴²⁹ May, [2].

⁴³⁰ May, [2].

goodness and beauty.”⁴³¹

Sandra M. Schneiders writes about the history of spirituality in the Christian tradition and considers how the term is used today. She observes that contemporary discussions of spirituality “suggest that spirituality has something to do with the unification of life by reference to something beyond the individual person.”⁴³² Thus, spirituality is “self-transcendence which gives integrity and meaning to the whole of life and to life in its wholeness by situating and orienting the person within the horizon of ultimacy in some ongoing and transforming way.”⁴³³ This commitment to reaching beyond self towards something of ultimate value may or may not refer to God or a religious tradition.

While Schneiders agrees that spirituality should be defined broadly enough to reflect individuals who may not recognize God as their sources of ultimacy, she argues that there is no such thing as a “generic spirituality.”⁴³⁴ She writes:

Every spirituality is necessarily historically concrete and therefore involves some thematically explicit commitments, some actual and distinct symbol system, some traditional language, in short, a theoretical-linguistic framework which is integral to it and without which it cannot be meaningfully discussed at all.⁴³⁵

Joann Wolski Conn agrees with Schneiders that we define spirituality in terms of human experience as one’s desire for transcendence beyond oneself. She identifies three ways in which people use the word today. First, it is used to describe the “general human capacity for self-transcendence, for movement beyond mere self-maintenance or self-

⁴³¹ May, [2].

⁴³² Sandra M. Schneiders, “Theology and Spirituality: Strangers, Rivals, of Partners?,” *Horizons* 13, no. 2 (1986), 266.

⁴³³ Schneiders, 266.

⁴³⁴ Schneiders, 266.

⁴³⁵ Schneiders, 266.

interest.”⁴³⁶ In this sense, spirituality is not necessarily linked to a religious tradition. Secondly, spirituality can refer to a desire to live beyond oneself that is “actualized by the holy, however that may be understood.”⁴³⁷ And, thirdly, spirituality can refer to a specific religious or spiritual tradition such as Christian spirituality, Jewish spirituality and so on.

Conn agrees with Schneiders that spirituality is tied to one’s sense of ultimacy and to living for larger purpose. She writes that “one acts out of the center or heart of one’s self in a way that reaches out in love, freedom, and truth to others and to the unrealized dimensions of one’s own capacities.”⁴³⁸ And, one reaches out in this way towards whatever one judges to be of ultimate value.⁴³⁹ Conn suggests that all spirituality is grounded in real, lived experience. She writes: “Spirituality as experience includes all the complexity and richness of each person’s historical and cultural location as well as the particularities of gender, race, class, and psychological development and the unique operation of divine grace within human personality.”⁴⁴⁰

Anne Carr writes to explicitly define a feminist understanding of spirituality informed by the historical reality of patriarchy. She writes that “(a) fully developed feminist spirituality would bear the traces of the central elements of feminist consciousness, integrated within a wider religious framework.”⁴⁴¹ It would include commitments to mutuality, interconnectedness, and interdependence and “encourage the

⁴³⁶ Joann Wolski Conn, “Toward Spiritual Maturity,” in *Exploring Christian Spirituality*, 356.

⁴³⁷ Conn, 356.

⁴³⁸ Conn, 356.

⁴³⁹ Conn, 356- 357.

⁴⁴⁰ Conn, 357.

⁴⁴¹ Anne Carr, “On Feminist Spirituality,” in *Women’s Spirituality: Resources for Christian Development*, ed. Joann Wolski Conn (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1986), 54.

autonomy, self-actualization, and self-transcendence of all women (and men).”⁴⁴² She considers spirituality “as the whole of our deepest religious beliefs, convictions, and patterns of thought, emotion, and behavior in respect to what is ultimate, to God.”⁴⁴³ She adds that a person’s spirituality is shaped by one’s “family, teachers, friends, community, class, race, culture, sex, and by our time in history, just as it is influenced by beliefs, intellectual positions, and moral options.”⁴⁴⁴ Thus, while spirituality is shaped according to our individuality, it is informed by the culture and society in which we live.

Lawrence L. LaPierre identifies six factors to individual spirituality based on his review of literature in the fields of religion, spirituality and, to a lesser extent, health-care.⁴⁴⁵ These include: “the journey, transcendence, community, religion, ‘mystery of creation,’ and transformation.”⁴⁴⁶ LaPierre uses the journey image to observe that individuals who make the decision to contemplate meaning and purpose are beginning a “journey of the spirit.”⁴⁴⁷ This journey may focus on encountering God but it may also focus on something else such as the quest to identify “universal truth.”⁴⁴⁸ LaPierre refers to religion as “what a person does in response to specific personal beliefs about a divine being or beings” rather than to a specific set of “rituals, rules, patterns of life, and other behavior” or “theologies, beliefs” and governing structures associated with established religious groups or traditions.⁴⁴⁹ The “mystery of creation” refers to the fact that many people have spiritually moving experiences in which they encounter the Divine or

⁴⁴² Carr, 54.

⁴⁴³ Carr, 49.

⁴⁴⁴ Carr, 50.

⁴⁴⁵ Lawrence L. LaPierre, “A Model of Describing Spirituality,” in *Exploring Christian Spirituality*, 75.

⁴⁴⁶ LaPierre, 75.

⁴⁴⁷ LaPierre, 76.

⁴⁴⁸ LaPierre, 77.

⁴⁴⁹ LaPierre, 79.

mystery while in nature. This journey to experience transcendence and personal transformation is engaged within a supportive community and may lead to transformation of these and other communities.

These conceptions of spirituality share a number of helpful insights. Spirituality refers to our basic human desire to experience transcendence or to live life for more than oneself. It involves our deepest passions, values and concerns including our sense of ultimacy which may or may not be God. Our human desire for authentic spirituality is a quest to live a life of vitality, creativity, depth and meaning. Spirituality is grounded in the embodied experiences of daily life and does not refer exclusively to extraordinary phenomena. Living a spiritually grounded life will foster a person's sense of compassion and fuel his or her desire to serve other individuals and the larger world with loving kindness and compassion.

Understanding Christian Spirituality

These conceptions of spirituality can help us define Christian spirituality. At the heart of a Christian understanding of spirituality is the affirmation that authentic spirituality is a gift from God. As Marjorie J. Thompson suggests, "Christian spirituality begins with God, depends on God, and ends in God."⁴⁵⁰ It is "initiated and sustained by One who lives both within and beyond us."⁴⁵¹ More specifically, our spiritual life is a gift of the Holy Spirit. Frank Rogers, Jr. offers a compelling vision of the Spirit "as the dance of God which moves through creation" and envisions living "life in that Spirit as

⁴⁵⁰ Thompson, 8.

⁴⁵¹ Thompson, 8.

becoming the dance partner of God.”⁴⁵² Rogers develops this image of the Spirit as the dance of God based on Karl Barth’s understanding of the Holy Spirit. Barth understood the Spirit as “the activity of God which seeks to draw humanity into reconciled life.”⁴⁵³ Barth describes three ways in which the Spirit dances with humanity: the Spirit awakens us to experience God’s grace, sanctifies us into a life of fullness, and urges us to work with God and one another for peace, justice and reconciliation.⁴⁵⁴

Elizabeth Campbell Johnson offers a feminist theological understanding of the Holy Spirit as Creator of the cosmos, human communities, human beings and all creatures.⁴⁵⁵ This Spirit is “the giver of life and lover of life, pervading the cosmos and all of its interrelated creatures with life. If she were to withdraw her divine presence everything would back to nothing.”⁴⁵⁶ Likewise the Creating Spirit is the source of healing, liberation and transformation for all of life as well as for human political and social institutions. She writes: “Justice and peace throughout the world of nature and the human world are the effects of the Spirit’s renewing power, coming to fruition whenever human beings find community in mutual relations of sympathy and love.”⁴⁵⁷

Likewise, the Spirit of God empowers individuals and communities to use their creativity, gifts and passions to witness to the saving love and grace of God in the world.⁴⁵⁸ Johnson challenges traditional notions of the Spirit to suggest that the Spirit of God values mutuality, inclusivity, and reciprocity in relationships with us and among

⁴⁵² Rogers, Jr., “Dancing with Grace,” 388.

⁴⁵³ Rogers, Jr., “Dancing with Grace,” 379.

⁴⁵⁴ Rogers, Jr., “Dancing with Grace,” 380-381.

⁴⁵⁵ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 133-134.

⁴⁵⁶ Johnson, 134.

⁴⁵⁷ Johnson, 136.

⁴⁵⁸ Johnson, 141.

us.⁴⁵⁹ Christian spirituality concerns how we as individual believers and faith communities live in relationship with this life giving Spirit.

May describes what he refers to as “the classical Christian expression of spirituality” as “the desire in and through Christ to love God with all one’s heart and mind and soul, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself.”⁴⁶⁰ He notes that individuals express their Christian spirituality in three ways: (1) by developing intimate knowledge of God through an intellectual examination of theology, biblical studies and other aspects of the faith; (2) through service or acts to promote justice; and, (3) through “sensory and emotional elements of the spiritual life” which focus on “direct, sensed experience of relationship with God and others” through acts of worship and praise.⁴⁶¹

Schneiders defines Christian spirituality as:

that particular actualization of the capacity for self-transcendence that is constituted by the substantial gift of the Holy Spirit establishing a life-giving relationship with God in Christ within the believing community. Thus, Christian spirituality is trinitarian, christological, and ecclesial religious experience.⁴⁶²

She adds: “The Transcendent who is the horizon, the focus, and the energizing source of Christian spirituality is an Other who is personal, living, and loving and is fully revealed in a human being, Jesus of Nazareth.”⁴⁶³

Philip Sheldrake shares Schneiders’ understanding of Christian spirituality as “Trinitarian, Christological, and ecclesial.”⁴⁶⁴ He writes that spirituality refers to a person’s “conscious relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, through the indwelling of the

⁴⁵⁹ Johnson, 145.

⁴⁶⁰ May, [2].

⁴⁶¹ May, [3-4].

⁴⁶² Schneiders, 266.

⁴⁶³ Schneiders, 267.

⁴⁶⁴ Philip Sheldrake, “What Is Spirituality?,” in *Exploring Christian Spirituality*, 40.

Spirit and in the context of the community of believers.”⁴⁶⁵ This understanding of spirituality is based on the central Christian premise “that as human beings we are capable of entering into a relationship with God who is both transcendent and, at the same time, indwelling in the heart of all created things.”⁴⁶⁶ This relationship between individuals and God is engaged through a community of like minded individuals who share a belief in and commitment to Jesus Christ which is “sustained by the active presence of the Spirit of God in each and in the community as a whole.”⁴⁶⁷ Finally, this commitment to self-transcendence is tied to the Christian conviction that the ability to live for life beyond oneself is a gift from the Holy Spirit.

Johnson and Dreitcer write that a Christian spirituality of today is one that can sustain people in the midst of doubt and crisis. They add:

At the core of this spirituality, a yearning for God drives us to explore the dark corners of ourselves, to pull into the light all the “stuff” that we have carefully hidden for years. This deep desire draws us into the presence of Transcendent Holiness, not to say or do anything, but to gaze upon the One who has loved us with an everlasting love. Our encounters with God leave a tiny deposit of certitude that gives us confidence that the Other will be meeting us not only in moments of devotion but in the common experiences of an ordinary day. And miraculously, we begin developing a confidence that God truly is in all things and that all things are parables of his Presence to be interpreted again and again in new and fresh ways.⁴⁶⁸

Christian Spiritual Formation Practices

Within the Christian tradition, there is consensus that the way in which an individual and a community of believers may foster spiritual growth is through regular engagement in spiritual formation activities. May writes that spiritual formation refers to

⁴⁶⁵ Sheldrake, 40.

⁴⁶⁶ Sheldrake, 40.

⁴⁶⁷ Sheldrake, 40.

⁴⁶⁸ Johnson and Dreitcer, 9-10.

intentional engagement in particular practices to open us to the presence of the Holy Spirit within our lives and the world around us. Engaging in these formation practices empowers us to “become more appreciative and responsive to the deep current of the Divine Presence that always has been and always will be alive within and beyond us.”⁴⁶⁹ May identifies four elements of spiritual formation: (1) regular engagement in silence through which we “remember who we are and what our deepest yearnings are for;” (2) times of solitude in which we focus on “who we are in God alone;” (3) participation in a community to nurture our spiritual growth; and, (4) regular engagement in contemplative practices that help us identify how to live our entire life in communion with God.⁴⁷⁰

Thompson describes the spiritual life in biblical terms as “the increasing vitality and sway of God’s spirit within us. It is a magnificent choreography of the Holy Spirit in the human spirit, moving us toward communion with both Creator and creation.”⁴⁷¹ Spiritual formation is the process by which the Holy Spirit conforms individuals into “the image of Christ.”⁴⁷² Spiritual formation leads us to ask: “What, in our personal or corporate life, needs to be re-formed?”⁴⁷³ This formation requires engagement in spiritual practices that help individuals “attend to the work of grace in our lives and our times.”⁴⁷⁴ Through regular engagement in spiritual disciplines, individuals will, in time, receive the grace to align our personal intentions with those of God and experience

⁴⁶⁹ May, [5].

⁴⁷⁰ May, [5-6].

⁴⁷¹ Thompson, 6. Thompson defines spirituality as “the universal human capacity to receive, reflect, and respond to the Spirit of God.” Spirituality “involves conscious awareness of, and assent to, the work of the Spirit in us.” Thus, “(s)pirituality points to a path--to choices of belief, value commitments, patterns of life, and practices of faith that allow Christ to be formed in us.” (7)

⁴⁷² Thompson, 6.

⁴⁷³ Thompson, 7.

⁴⁷⁴ Thompson, 9.

freedom to serve Christ.⁴⁷⁵

Richard Foster, author of the classic *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, writes that “(t)he classical Disciplines of the spiritual life call us to move beyond surface living into the depths.”⁴⁷⁶ He describes spiritual disciplines as the means by which individuals open themselves to receive God’s grace. Through regular engagement in these disciplines, individuals and faith communities open their hearts to the Spirit of God who nurtures our capacity to experience God’s presence in our lives and the world around us.⁴⁷⁷ Foster identifies practices for both individuals and faith communities. His practices include: meditation, contemplative prayer, fasting, study, simplicity, solitude, submission, service, confession, worship, guidance and celebration.

Craig Dykstra and Dorothy C. Bass offer the following definition of Christian practices: “*Christian practices are things Christian people do together over time in response to and in light of God’s active presence for the life of the world.*”⁴⁷⁸ Dykstra develops his understanding of Christian practices in more detail in *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices*. He examines how congregations can use historical Christian practices to help individuals and the faith community deepen their understanding of discipleship, experience rich life in the Spirit and empower them to engage in acts of compassion and justice. Dykstra defines practices as “those cooperative

⁴⁷⁵ Thompson, 11.

⁴⁷⁶ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. 20th Anniversary ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 1.

⁴⁷⁷ Foster, 8.

⁴⁷⁸ Craig Dykstra and Dorothy C. Bass, “Times of Yearning, Practices of Faith,” in *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997), 5. Italics in the original. Different authors describe the following practices in this text: honoring the body; practicing hospitality and service; home economics or living well in the home; saying yes and saying no through prayer and examination of conscience; keeping Sabbath; testimony; discernment; shaping communities; forgiveness; healing; dying well; and, singing our lives.

human activities through which we, as individuals and as communities, grow and develop in moral character and substance.”⁴⁷⁹

Dykstra defines a Christian practice as

a coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which powerful internal goods are realized and through the pursuit of which our capacities as human beings to do and to be and to conceive of what God is calling us to become are systematically extended.⁴⁸⁰

Dykstra describes practices as “patterns of communal action that create openings in our lives where the grace, mercy, and presence of God may be known to us. They are places where the power of God is experienced.”⁴⁸¹ Thus, he suggests that through regular engagement in Christian practices, individuals and communities “learn Christian faith, become Christian.”⁴⁸² He identifies fourteen historical practices as “means of grace” through which “God’s people come to faith and grow to maturity in the life of faith.”⁴⁸³ He writes that practices are “places in the contours of our personal and communal lives where a habitation of the Spirit is able to occur. And it is this that is the source of their power and meaning.”⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁷⁹ Dykstra, 69.

⁴⁸⁰ Dykstra, 70.

⁴⁸¹ Dykstra, 66.

⁴⁸² Dykstra, 70.

⁴⁸³ Dykstra, 43. Dykstra identifies these practices: (1) worship; (2) study; (3) scriptural interpretation; (4) prayer; (5) confession; (6) tolerance and encouragement of one another’s vocation; (7) service; (8) stewardship; (9) suffering with and for others; (10) radical Christian hospitality; (11) attentive listening and talking with others; (12) struggling to discern of our current reality; (13) prophetic resistance; and, (14) working together for shalom. Dykstra argues that congregations must engage all 14 practices. See Dykstra, 42-43.

⁴⁸⁴ Dykstra, 64.

Dykstra writes about how Christian education teaches people practices. He concludes:

The practices of faith are not ultimately our own practices but rather habitations of the Spirit, in the midst of which we are invited to participate in the practices of God. So, too, education in faith is not ultimately an ethical or spiritual striving but rather participation in the educating work of God's Spirit among us and within us. In this way, education in faith is itself a means of grace.⁴⁸⁵

These different perspectives on spiritual formation and the role of Christian disciplines or practices in this formation illuminate how chaplains, interfaith directors and other caring adults can nurture the spiritual growth of young adults who identify as Christian. These authors remind us that Christian spirituality first and foremost begins with God. And yet, spiritual formation also requires a willingness on our part to be open to receiving the Spirit of God. This formation process is not easy and requires that we be honest with ourselves and God about our deepest desires and unmet longings. Only when we truly make ourselves vulnerable to the Spirit will true growth occur.

In addition, spiritual formation requires intentionality. It requires that we set aside the time and space to engage in specific disciplines such as silence, solitude and prayer to open ourselves to the movement of the Spirit. Spiritual formation is best done in community where we can be challenged to ask tough questions about oneself and receive support as we seek to connect with God. Spiritual formation involves active engagement in both individual and communal practices as a means of God's grace.

Spiritual formation is a gift of the Spirit and growth happens through the power of the Spirit, not by our own efforts. Any attempts we make to credit for this growth distorts the purpose of these practices. When we take the time to engage in this deep

⁴⁸⁵ Dykstra, 78.

inner work, through the grace of God, we will experience a newness of life and over time, become inspired to be compassionate with ourselves and to offer compassion to others. Finally, through regular engagement in spiritual practices as individuals and within a community of believers, the Spirit of God empowers individuals and communities of faith to seek social transformation through acts of compassion and justice.

Exploration of Particular Christian Practices

Our examination of spiritual formation suggests that spiritual growth is a gift of God, initiated by the Spirit of God as a means of grace and an invitation into authentic relationship and transformation. Christians open themselves to deep encounters with the Holy One through engagement in spiritual practices. A number of these practices serve as invaluable resources to interfaith directors, chaplains and other mentors concerned about the spiritual growth and development of young adults.

Christian Discernment and the Ignatian Tradition

Elizabeth Liebert reminds us that discernment is both a Christian spiritual practice and a way of life.⁴⁸⁶ According to Liebert, discernment can be defined as “the process of intentionally becoming aware of how God is present, active and calling us as individuals and communities so that we can respond with increasingly greater faithfulness.”⁴⁸⁷ To engage in discernment means to participate in “the process of sifting out what is of God, discriminating between that which expresses God’s call and anything that runs counter to

⁴⁸⁶ Elizabeth Liebert, *The Way of Discernment: Spiritual Practices for Decision Making* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

⁴⁸⁷ Liebert, 8.

it.”⁴⁸⁸

Liebert identifies five foundational elements of discernment as a way of life. First, discernment requires individuals to identify our deepest desires and to place them before God. This includes naming hidden and sometimes unhealthy or destructive desires that may inhibit our ability to live an authentic, undivided life. She writes that we can only truly experience wholeness and integrity when we turn all our desires over to God so that they may be purified.⁴⁸⁹

Second, discernment as a way of life requires that we recognize that we are both saved by the grace of Jesus Christ and sinners. Liebert notes that we can only truly value the amazing gift of salvation when we know our broken state as sinners. And yet, even as we acknowledge our need for God’s grace for salvation, failure to understand that we have already received this gift can immobilize us and leads us to doubt our ability to meaningfully serve God.

Third, it is important that we believe and live into the reality that human beings are called to be co-creators with God.⁴⁹⁰ Liebert writes:

We follow God’s will through our ongoing relationship with God, who invites us to discover our purpose and meaning through our decisions and actions. Those choices reveal to us who we are as individuals, created, saved, graced, and missioned. By our human freedom, we constantly uncover the will of God in an open, flexible universe.⁴⁹¹

⁴⁸⁸ Liebert, 8. Liebert highlights nine characteristics of Christian discernment: (1) it is a gift of God, initiated by God’s Spirit; (2) it is “a habit of faith;” (3) it is the way we express our desire to follow Christ; (4) it grows when we trust our ability to live a discerning lifestyle even in times of doubt; (5) it empowers us to live more meaningful lives in tune with God’s design; (6) it requires that we make all decisions, large and small, in light of our desire to follow God; (7) it is an ongoing process through which we declare our intention to “put on the mind of Christ” in all our life choices; (8) it takes place in community; and, (9) it is the means by which we seek to live in partnership with God in midst of the complexities of contemporary life. For more information, see Liebert, 9-10.

⁴⁸⁹ Liebert, 28.

⁴⁹⁰ Liebert, 30-31.

⁴⁹¹ Liebert, 31.

The fourth foundational element of discernment as a way of life is to develop the capacity to freely choose to follow God's call or to understand that our "best choice is that which is more pleasing to God."⁴⁹² Liebert refers to Ignatius of Loyola's concept of indifference which he used to describe our ability to "as free as is humanly possible to follow the call of God."⁴⁹³ The fifth foundational piece is recognizing that living a life of discernment will lead us to desire to serve God in bold, new ways.⁴⁹⁴

Liebert suggests that making decisions according to the spiritual practice of discernment requires individuals to cultivate the capacity "to recognize God's desires in each moment" and to seek "God's call in the very process of making these decisions."⁴⁹⁵ She reminds us that through discernment, we desire to choose between two options that are consistent with the will of God. At the same time, we must also acknowledge that sometimes the answer to our decision is not always clear or final.

Johnson and Dreitcer suggest that "(d)iscernment is not for the weakhearted, since it requires wrestling with both angels and demons."⁴⁹⁶ They agree with Liebert that the primary purpose of Christian discernment

is to make us increasingly available to God over the course of our lives as we deliberately submit our hard choices to God's love. Like other spiritual practices, discernment results in an ever-deepening relationship with Christ and an ever-clearer understanding of who we are before God.⁴⁹⁷

They observe that Christian discernment focuses more on "deepening our

⁴⁹² Liebert, 33.

⁴⁹³ Liebert, 33.

⁴⁹⁴ Liebert, 37.

⁴⁹⁵ Liebert, 8.

⁴⁹⁶ Johnson and Dreitcer, 99.

⁴⁹⁷ Johnson and Dreitcer, 100.

relationship with Christ than it does with making right decisions.”⁴⁹⁸ It is a lifelong process of trying to conform our deepest yearnings, desires or longings to God’s yearnings, desires or longings for us as we seek to faithfully serve as God’s disciples in the world.

The ability to engage in discernment is an invaluable skill or practice that many college students have never encountered. Learning how to uncover one’s true passions or deepest desires can help young adults address critical identity questions as they seek to name their core ethical, religious or spiritual values and beliefs and consider how these commitments can inform their choice of career and how they can live a meaningful life. There are several discernment practices in particular that may be of value to college students.

As Johnson and Dreitcer observe, the dominant approach to Christian discernment in the West is the process developed by St. Ignatius of Loyola as outlined in his *Spiritual Exercises*.⁴⁹⁹ Ignatius, founder of the Society of Jesus, or the Jesuits, developed a thirty-five-day spiritual formation retreat to help Christians identify how they could more clearly follow the call of Christ.⁵⁰⁰ The following prayer practices are offered in the tradition of Ignatian discernment.

The Prayer of Examen: This prayer is one of a number of prayers St. Ignatius included

⁴⁹⁸ Johnson and Dreitcer, 101.

⁴⁹⁹ Johnson and Dreitcer, 106.

⁵⁰⁰ Ignatius developed the spiritual exercises around four thematic weeks. During week one, individuals are invited to identify their sinful nature and prayerfully accept God’s forgiveness and love. During week two, individuals pray through the life of Christ so that they may follow the path of discipleship more clearly. Week three focuses on contemplating the passion of Christ so that individuals may develop the capacity to empathize and suffer with others and week four involves prayerfully engaging Christ’s resurrection so that individuals may joyfully embrace God’s saving work in their own lives and be inspired to serve others likewise. See Dean Brackley, *The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times: New Perspectives on the Transformative Wisdom of Ignatius of Loyola* (New York: Crossroad, 2011).

in his *Spiritual Exercises*. Through this prayer, individuals are invited to identify their spiritual consolations and desolations by prayerfully reflecting upon their life experiences. For Ignatius, consolations are feelings from the Holy Spirit as gifts that provide us with deep joy, inner peace, hope, faith and love.⁵⁰¹ Consolations provide us with “new energies, widens our vision, and directs us beyond ourselves” but may also involve experiences of grief or remorse.⁵⁰² Desolations are feelings that evoke despair or alienation that often lead to the narrowing of one’s vision and negativity.⁵⁰³

Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn and Matthew Linn have written an excellent book on the Prayer of Examen.⁵⁰⁴ They note that Ignatius believed that this particular prayer was the mainstay of the spiritual life. Through regular engagement in this prayer, individuals are able to discern the types of activities, people, places and experiences that give meaning to their life as well as those that do not. Regular engagement in this prayer also helps individuals develop the capacity to examine and interpret an experience as it unfolds in the present moment. Thus, the prayer allows us to cultivate deeper inner awareness. And, as we make changes in our life as guided by this prayer, we experience vitality and a clear sense of purpose.

The Prayer of Examen is described in detail in Appendix A. Basically, the prayer invites individuals to set aside time each day, typically at the end of their day, to prayerfully contemplate with the Divine when during the day they felt most alive and when during the day they felt life draining out of them. Individuals use these insights to

⁵⁰¹ Brackley, 133.

⁵⁰² Brackley, 48-49.

⁵⁰³ Brackley, 49-50.

⁵⁰⁴ Dennis Linn, Sheila Frabricant Linn, and Matthew Lin, *Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995).

consider how to change their lives to live more consistent with the will of God and to experience spiritual vitality.

A Prayer of Remembrance: Teresa A. Blythe offers this prayer practice in the tradition of Ignatian prayer.⁵⁰⁵ This prayer invites individuals to use all their senses and energies to prayerfully reflect upon a past experience, event or memory to discern new meaning. She writes that as this prayer unfolds, we should “(a)llow this memory to deepen and expand so that it becomes for you a window to God.”⁵⁰⁶ After re-encountering this past experience, the practitioner spends time reflecting upon how he or she felt in the process of prayerfully re-visiting the experience. This prayer is explained in more detail in Appendix A.

Praying Ultimate Questions: This prayer invites people to pray about questions of profound meaning and significance. Blythe provides a list of ultimate questions that focus on the meaning of life, God and community. As the practitioner moves through the different steps of this prayer, he or she prayerfully contemplates a question from this list, why he or she selected the question that they did, how God may be present in the question and their reflections upon the question. See Appendix A for more information.

Ignatian Decision Making: Frank Rogers, Jr. describes how individuals can make decisions based on the model described in the *Spiritual Exercises*.⁵⁰⁷ He observes that in

⁵⁰⁵ Teresa A. Blythe, *50 Ways to Pray: Practices from Many Traditions and Times* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006).

⁵⁰⁶ Blythe, 62.

⁵⁰⁷ In *The Way of Discernment*, Liebert outlines a seven step discernment process for making decisions. First, we pray for spiritual freedom or the ability to freely choose what God most deeply desires for us. Second, we seek to identify the real decision that we are trying to make. Thirdly, we gather all information about the options before us. Fourth, we engage in prayer and reflection as we sort through the information we have collected. Fifthly, we make a tentative decision. Liebert offers a variety of resources to use when trying to reach a tentative decision. These include: drawing upon memories from previous moments of decision making; using our intuition and drawing upon the collective wisdom of a supportive community;

order for authentic discernment to occur, individuals must possess three commitments: a desire to follow and serve God, indifference towards any desire other than to follow God and a respect for the ways of God.⁵⁰⁸ The process involves a series of steps. First, an individual considers the multiple dimensions of the decision to be made by gathering information related to the decision and weighing the pros and cons of the decision. Second, the person spends time prayerfully considering the option to which they feel least attracted. During this period of reflection, the individual acts as if the decision has been made and prayerfully considers what consolations or desolations arise and the source of these feelings. As Rogers notes, this process “requires patience, honesty, humility, and keen sensitivity to the Spirit’s music.”⁵⁰⁹

The next step is for the person to repeat this process with the option to which they are most attracted. Afterwards, the person compares how the reflection processes for these two options felt to see which choice makes them feel most alive. This leads the individual to make a tentative choice. The person sits with this decision for a period of time during which he or she invites God to help confirm their decision. Finally, the person acts “in the direction that seemed most harmonious with the Spirit.”⁵¹⁰ After all, as Rogers’ reminds us, “(d)iscernment is for action.”⁵¹¹ Rogers reminds us that discernment can be dangerous because we often deceive ourselves. He invites us to draw

reading the signals of our body; using imagination and guided prayer; using critical thinking skills and reason; allowing our feelings to guide us; and, using nature and our reactions to nature. Many people use a combination of these to reach a tentative decision. Sixth, after making a tentative decision, we seek confirmation by returning to God in prayer. During this time of confirmation, we consider how the decision makes us feel deep inside. Finally, we examine the entire seven step discernment process to ensure that we have acted from a place of spiritual openness and freedom. See Liebert, 19-21.

⁵⁰⁸ Frank Rogers, Jr., “Discernment,” in *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 107-108.

⁵⁰⁹ Rogers, Jr., “Discernment,” 109.

⁵¹⁰ Rogers, Jr., “Discernment,” 110.

⁵¹¹ Rogers, Jr., “Discernment,” 110.

upon different sources to assess the authenticity of our discernment process including Scripture, the way in which the decision manifests (or not) love, cultivates inner peace and wholeness, and promotes communal harmony and to assess the level to which we engaged the discernment process with integrity.⁵¹²

Sacred Reading

Since the early days of Christianity, faithful men and women have sought to meditate on the Scriptures with their intellect, intuition and feelings to experience communion with God. In fact, as Johnson and Dreitcer observe, the predominant way in which Christians have historically approached the Bible is “as a sacred setting for encountering the Presence of God.”⁵¹³ Praying, singing or otherwise engaging the Scripture in this way leads individuals to meet the Holy One in “new and unexpected ways.”⁵¹⁴

Intellectual, logical and rational engagement with historical and contemporary texts to develop one’s critical thinking capacities is a central part of the undergraduate academic experience. Teaching Christian college students to approach the Bible as a way of encountering God rather than critically analyzing the text using the tools of contemporary biblical scholarship can help them experience the Word of God in new, life affirming ways.

Lectio Divina: The practice of sacred reading or *lectio divina* has deep roots in the Christian tradition. As early as the fourth century Christian monks living in the desert of Egypt wrote about meditating upon Scripture as a way of maintaining one’s spiritual

⁵¹² Rogers, Jr., “Discernment,” 114-116.

⁵¹³ Johnson and Dreitcer, 36.

⁵¹⁴ Johnson and Dreitcer, 38.

well-being.⁵¹⁵ Benedict of Nursia, founder of the Benedictine Order in the fifth century, is attributed with institutionalizing the process of *lectio divina* used by many Christians today. Benedictine brothers sought to live their lives as “an expression or reflection of the Word – to become, in effect, a living Word.”⁵¹⁶ They were expected to spend two to four hours a day engaged in spiritual reading. During this time, the monks read and listened to the words of the texts over and over again, pondering deep in their hearts on how the Word of God was speaking to them.

Lectio divina is a way of approaching biblical texts with an open mind and heart. Through a series of steps, individuals are invited to let the words of Scripture literally become alive within them. In so doing, the words become a source of wisdom, healing, and/or challenge. Over the years, different approaches to *lectio divina* have evolved. One common approach involves five steps: (1) begin by selecting and reading a passage of Scripture several times to identify a word upon which to reflect (*lectio*); (2) slowly repeat this word over and over again to let the word dwell within you (*ruminato*); (3) meditate on the word by considering how it makes you feel, how it may speak to something in your life, or how you may want to respond to the word (*meditatio*); (4) prayerfully wait for God to engage you through your reflection on this word (*contemplation*); and, (5) conclude by sharing your thoughts or experiences with this word with God in prayer (*oratio*).⁵¹⁷ Some alternative forms of *lectio divina* invite you to prayerfully read poems, prayers or devotional books or to reflect as you listen to sacred

⁵¹⁵ Andrew Deeter Dreitcer, *Roles of the Bible in Christian Spirituality: A Study of Seven Congregations* (PhD diss., Ann Arbor: UMI, 1993), 23.

⁵¹⁶ Dreitcer, *Roles of the Bible*, 22.

⁵¹⁷ Andrew Deeter Dreitcer, “Lectio Divina: A Way of Praying with Scripture,” handout for IS 312 *Prayer Traditions*, Spring 2006, at the Claremont School of Theology.

music or walk in nature. See Appendix A for more information.

Prayers of the Imagination: Another way Christians engage Scripture is to use their imagination to literally place themselves into that sacred stories of the Bible. The Prayer of Desire, based on Mark 10:46-52, is one such practice. After reading this story several times, the person is invited to use his or her imagination to see the story unfold before them. They are invited to answer the question Jesus asks in this text: “What do you want me to do for you?” After the action of the story is complete, individuals reflect upon Divine invitations they may have received through the story.

Practices of Contemplation

Walter J. Burghardt refers to contemplation as the act of taking “a long loving look at the real.”⁵¹⁸ It is the process by which one enters into deep, loving communion with the Creator, the created order and other people by using all of one’s senses, feelings and intuitive knowing. Through contemplation, we are emboldened to offer compassion to others in the same way that Christ offers unconditional compassion to us. May reminds us that “contemplation” means “directly perceiving things as they really are” in the real world.⁵¹⁹ It refers to “bringing a prayerful attitude to all situations, seeking God and God’s guidance in all things, practicing the presence of God.”⁵²⁰ May emphasizes that contemplation and action are deeply related and that one necessarily leads to the other. While contemplative practices often involve silence so that we may identify and reject our “prejudices or preoccupations” and respond to the spiritual dynamics of life,

⁵¹⁸ Walter J. Burghardt, “Contemplation: A Long Loving Look at the Real,” in *Church*, (Winter 1989): 16.

⁵¹⁹ May, [4].

⁵²⁰ May, [4].

“authentic contemplation always finds its way into action.”⁵²¹

William H. Shannon also emphasizes the unity of contemplation and action. He describes contemplation as “a way of making oneself aware of the presence of God who is always there.”⁵²² Through contemplation, we enter into deep union with God and uncover our “true self in God.”⁵²³ Shannon draws upon Thomas Merton to affirm that through contemplation, all dualisms including the dualism between contemplation and action disappear. He writes: “In this deep experience of nondualism, contemplatives find that just as they cannot separate God from God’s creation, so they cannot separate contemplation from concern for, and engagement in, the needs and problems of the age in which they live.”⁵²⁴

Through out the history of Christianity, men and women have sought union with God through contemplative prayer. Johnson and Dreitcer describe contemplative prayer as “resting with God” or being present with the Divine “in a way that does not involve human effort.”⁵²⁵ There are two main forms of contemplative prayer: apophatic and kataphatic prayer.

Apophatic Prayer: This type of prayer rejects the use of images, words, or feelings in favor of simply resting in the presence of God in Christ “who fills the place where images and words and thoughts have previously been.”⁵²⁶ Shannon observes that apophatic prayer can be traced back to Gregory of Nyssa in the early fourth century and that it is often referred to as “the way of negation” or the process by which one enters into

⁵²¹ May, [4].

⁵²² William H. Shannon, “Contemplation, Contemplative Prayer,” in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Michael Downey (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 209.

⁵²³ Shannon, 209.

⁵²⁴ Shannon, 214.

⁵²⁵ Johnson and Dreitcer, 138.

⁵²⁶ Johnson and Dreitcer, 139.

“dazzling darkness” and deep union with the Mystery that is God.⁵²⁷ Two common forms of apophatic prayer include centering prayer and the Jesus Prayer.

Centering Prayer: Johnson and Dreitcer suggest that the key to centering prayer is to focus on our *intention* to be present with God “rather than focusing our *attention* on God or some aspect of God’s nature.”⁵²⁸ As an apophatic form of prayer, centering prayer suggests that we have no way of focusing on locating God. One form of centering prayer begins with selecting a sacred word such as love, peace, or mercy that “expresses our intention to consent to God’s presence and action” within us.⁵²⁹ Next, you are invited to sit down, close your eyes, and to begin to let go of different thoughts, perceptions, feelings, images, concepts and so on by slowly thinking about your sacred word. As you silently sit and try to be present with God, you may gently repeat your sacred word as a way of focusing your entire being on God. It is the hope and expectation that as one practices centering prayer over time, he or she will need to use this sacred word less and less. As Johnson and Dreitcer note, “(i)n Centering Prayer the sacred word reminds us of our intention to be open to God and helps us rest in God’s Presence.”⁵³⁰ As a person incorporates centering prayer into his or her life on a daily basis, he or she may begin to feel deeper communion through out one’s entire day.

The Jesus Prayer: This historic prayer has roots in the ancient Desert tradition and remains of central importance to Orthodox Christianity. The first prayer, based on Luke 18:38 and Luke 18:13, is the phrase: “(Lord) Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on

⁵²⁷ Shannon, 211-212.

⁵²⁸ Johnson and Dreitcer, 146. Italics in the original.

⁵²⁹ Contemplative Outreach, “The Method of Centering Prayer.” Accessed March 20, 2006, <http://www.centeringprayer.com/methodcp.htm>.

⁵³⁰ Johnson and Dreitcer, 147.

me (a sinner).”⁵³¹ Dreitcer observes the Jesus Prayer became important in the Orthodox church as monastics in the Eastern church engaged and then institutionalized the practice of repeating short biblically-based prayers.⁵³² Dreitcer suggests that the desert monks believed that there was “divine power in speaking or meditating upon the divine name.”⁵³³

In the 18th century, St. Marcus of Corinth and St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, two spiritual leaders of the Eastern Church, published *The Philokalia*, a book dedicated to describing the history of the Jesus Prayer and its impact on Christians.⁵³⁴ This book and the Jesus Prayer itself take center stage in *The Way of the Pilgrim*, the spiritual diary of an anonymous Russian Orthodox pilgrim written in the 1800’s.⁵³⁵ The pilgrim describes how the Jesus Prayer radically changed his life after he learned and practiced it as guided by an older cleric while on a pilgrimage to learn how to pray without ceasing as directed in First Thessalonians 5:17. In the 20th century *The Way of the Pilgrim* was published in English and the Jesus Prayer slowly began to make its way West.

Johnson and Dreitcer describe three phases of the Jesus Prayer.⁵³⁶ Before beginning the prayer, individuals should decide which version to use-- the long version of the prayer noted above or the shorter phrase “Jesus Christ, have mercy.” Once this decision is made, the person begins to recite the prayer over and over again. He or she should pray the prayer as frequently as possible through out the day. This first phase is

⁵³¹ Andrew Deeter Dreitcer, “Background Material” – “The Jesus Prayer,” handout for IS 312 *Prayer Traditions*, Spring 2006, at the Claremont School of Theology.

⁵³² Dreitcer, “Background Material.”

⁵³³ Dreitcer, “Background Material.”

⁵³⁴ Lev Gillet, *The Jesus Prayer*, rev. ed. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1987), 66-67.

⁵³⁵ Gillet, 81-83.

⁵³⁶ Johnson and Dreitcer, 145-146.

referred to as the bodily or physical prayer. In time, one may enter into the second phase of the prayer in which one's mind simply takes over praying the prayer. Finally, in time, some people may move into the third stage of the prayer known as the "mind in the heart." At this stage, people are no longer consciously aware that their mind is saying the prayer; rather, their entire life becomes centered on God.⁵³⁷

Kataphatic Prayer: This form of prayer draws upon images, life experience or one's imagination to rest in the presence of God. This tradition of prayer, referred to as the "way of affirmation," can be traced back to Origin.⁵³⁸ Ignatian prayers of imagination and other prayers noted above are examples of kataphatic prayer.

The Labyrinth

The practice of prayerfully engaging a labyrinth has become popular in Western Christianity. Labyrinths have been in existence for over 4,000 years and can be traced to different cultures.⁵³⁹ The oldest existing Christian labyrinth is located in the fourth-century basilica of Reparatus, Orleansville, Algeria.⁵⁴⁰ Through out history, Christians have used labyrinths for different reasons. During the Middles Ages, people used labyrinths to symbolically engage in a pilgrimage to Jerusalem—both the city in Palestine and the Heavenly Jerusalem.⁵⁴¹

The practice of walking a labyrinth is an invitation to spend time in contemplation. Unlike a maze, the labyrinth contains one single pathway. There is only one way to enter and exit the path. Individuals are invited to walk into the labyrinth at

⁵³⁷ Johnson and Dreitcer, 145-146.

⁵³⁸ Shannon, "Contemplation, Contemplative Prayer," 211.

⁵³⁹ St. Andrew's Catholic Community, *The Labyrinth* (Boulder City, NV).

⁵⁴⁰ *The Enigma of the Labyrinth*, publication from Chartres Cathedral, Chartres, France, 8. Handout for IS 312 *Prayer Traditions*, Spring 2006, at the Claremont School of Theology.

⁵⁴¹ *The Enigma of the Labyrinth*, 9.

their own pace. People can walk labyrinths alone or in groups. People will have very different experiences walking a labyrinth. While there is no right way to walk a labyrinth, a variety of books offer different ways individuals or groups may engage the labyrinth.

One approach is based on the classic three-fold path of prayer within the Christian tradition.⁵⁴² Before beginning the process of walking, individuals are invited to take off their shoes, identify a sacred word (grace, love, Christ, Lord, Spirit) and to silently repeat this sacred word to themselves. When they begin to walk the labyrinth, repeating this sacred word can help them refocus their thoughts back to the labyrinth if they experience distractions. As people enter into the labyrinth, they try to empty their minds of distracting thoughts as in the classical step of *purgation*. Upon quieting one's mind, the practitioner slowly walks into the center where they spend time in meditation. This is a time of seeking clarity or insight from God through *illumination*. Finally, as the person begins his or her journey out of the labyrinth in *union* with the Divine, they pray about how to re-enter the world with a renewed commitment to serve God and others.

While I have highlighted several spiritual practices from the Christian tradition, this list is by no way complete. This discussion has focused on the practices I use most frequently with college students. Other practices that could be added to this discussion include Christian hospitality and service, worship, praying with icons, or using the creative arts such as music, painting, poetry and journal writing to express one's spirituality. All of these practices are ways in which individuals seek to enter into communion with the Holy Spirit and by which we seek healing, renewal, vitality and

⁵⁴² St. Andrew's Catholic Church, *The Labyrinth*.

transformation.

Teaching practices such as those described here to college students is both incredibly challenging and rewarding. The life of a typical college student today is filled with continuous activity, distraction and noise. When students are not in class or studying, they are often attending student club meetings or campus events, working at internships or other forms of paid or unpaid employment, texting on cell phones or spending hours on the internet connecting with others through various forms of social media. For many, the notion of unplugging, stopping and resting is a foreign and perhaps even frightening concept. It is my sense that many young adults keep themselves busy because they have bought into the dominant social message that success is measured in terms of one's accomplishments or avoid introspection because they are afraid of the questions or anxieties that they may encounter in the silence. Young people should be encouraged to engage in these practices so that they may grow into healthy, creative, compassionate and empowered young adults.

Engaged Buddhism

Thich Nhat Hanh, founder of Engaged Buddhism and the Unified Buddhist Church, writes that "(p)eople of all faiths use some form of prayer or meditation in their spiritual practice, although it can look quite different."⁵⁴³ He suggests that for Buddhists, the ability to pray rests on the ability to practice mindfulness. Thich Nhat Hanh describes mindfulness as the ability to keep "one's consciousness alive to the present reality."⁵⁴⁴ It

⁵⁴³ Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Energy of Prayer: How to Deepen Your Spiritual Practice* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2006), 19.

⁵⁴⁴ Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness: An Introduction to the Practice of Mindfulness*, trans. by Mobi Ho (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), 11.

is the ability to live in the present moment. Through the energy of mindfulness, individuals direct all their thoughts, feelings, and energies to solving a problem, send healing energies to other people or otherwise reflect upon one's life. He writes:

How do we pray? We pray with our mouth and our thoughts, but that is not enough. We have to pray with our body, speech, and mind and with our daily life. With mindfulness, our body, speech, and mind can become one. In the state of oneness of body, speech, and mind, we can produce the energy of faith and love necessary to change a difficult situation.⁵⁴⁵

The practice of mindfulness reminds us that happiness is not a goal to be achieved in the future, it is a way to live our daily lives. When a person engages in mindfulness, he or she develops the ability to become more self-aware as they are able to acknowledge their emotions, feelings and experiences as they unfold in the present moment. They are also able to concentrate more clearly on their interconnection with other people and the world. This enables them to become aware of the suffering of others and helps them identify how to practice compassion to alleviate suffering.

Thich Nhat Hanh describes how regular engagement in mindfulness practices will lead us to consider central questions about meaning. He writes:

As you deepen your spiritual practice, you begin to question. You may want to know clearly, Where do I come from? Why am I here? Where shall I go? After death, do I continue to exist or not? Is there any relationship between myself and Buddha, between myself and God? What is the original purpose of my being here? These are the questions, the prayers, of a dedicated spiritual practitioner.⁵⁴⁶

He suggests that the ultimate goal for the spiritual practitioner is to connect with the ultimate dimension which in Buddhist terms means reaching ultimate insight.

Mindfulness is both the key to Buddhist prayer and a way of living one's life.

The members of Thich Nhat Hanh's monastic community located at Plum Village,

⁵⁴⁵ Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Energy of Prayer*, 41.

⁵⁴⁶ Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Energy of Prayer*, 49-50.

France practice mindful living. Members of this community engage daily tasks with an attitude of living in the present moment. Meals at Plum Village are eaten in silence so that people are able to focus completely on the food they are chewing. When walking to the meditation hall or around the communal grounds, people walk mindfully. Whenever a bell rings at Plum Village (like a telephone or a bell on a clock), everyone immediately stops what they are doing and breathes mindfully until the bells have stopped ringing.

One of the most helpful ways to learn the practice of mindfulness is to learn how to breathe to center yourself. Thich Nhat Hanh describes breath as “the bridge which connects life to consciousness, which unites your body to your thoughts. Whenever your mind becomes scattered, use your breath as the means to take hold of your mind again.”⁵⁴⁷ Thich Nhat Hanh suggests that we begin by breathing in a long breath and concentrating on the fact that you are inhaling a deep breath. Next, breathe out all the breath in your lungs and again, concentrate on the fact that you are exhaling. As you practice slow and mindful breathing, you will gradually develop the capacity to engage in whole-body breathing as a way of centering yourself.

Thich Nhat Hanh explains how basic acts of daily living can be done mindfully. This includes basic tasks like washing dishes. While washing the dishes, consider washing as the most important thing in life. Give each dish your full attention. In this way, “(w)ashing the dishes is at the same time a means and an end—that is, not only do we do the dishes in order to have clean dishes, we also do the dishes just to do the dishes, to live fully in each moment while washing them.”⁵⁴⁸ Thus, washing dishes is a

⁵⁴⁷ Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness*, 15.

⁵⁴⁸ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life* (New York: Bantam Books, 1991), 27.

mindfulness meditation. Another important form of mindfulness is deep listening. This is the act of focusing all of one's attention to listening deeply and with compassion to another.

Walking Meditation: One of the more well known mindfulness practices is a walking meditation. This is the process of walking mindfully. Thich Nhat Hanh writes that the purpose of walking meditation “is to be in the present moment and, aware of our breathing and walking, to enjoy each step.”⁵⁴⁹ Walking meditation can be done at any time. It involves walking with intention. It involves slowly putting your feet on the ground and thinking about your connection to the earth below.⁵⁵⁰ As people walk, they are invited to match their breathing with their steps as a way of staying focused on the present moment. Thich Nhat Hanh writes that “(w)hen we are able to take one step peacefully and happily, we are working for the cause of peace and happiness for the whole of humankind.”⁵⁵¹

Sitting Meditation: Another way to cultivate mindfulness is through sitting meditation. Thich Nhat Hanh describes meditation as “the marrow of Buddhist practice.”⁵⁵² He writes:

The aim of meditation is to help the practitioner arrive at a deep understanding of reality. This insight has the capacity to liberate us from fear, anxiety, and melancholy. It can produce understanding and compassion, raise the quality of life, and bring freedom, peace, and joy to ourselves and to others around us.⁵⁵³

Through daily meditation, we develop the ability to recognize pain in ourselves and others as well as the ability to heal through concentration and insight. “When we

⁵⁴⁹ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Peace Is Every Step*, 27.

⁵⁵⁰ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Peace Is Every Step*, 28.

⁵⁵¹ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Peace Is Every Step*, 28.

⁵⁵² Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Energy of Prayer*, 103.

⁵⁵³ Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Energy of Prayer*, 103.

meditate with our focus on compassion, then we practice love. This transmission of energy is a form of prayer.”⁵⁵⁴ In meditation, one directs loving kindness and compassion to loved ones. When we produce this energy of loving kindness and compassion in our heart, the energy heals our own mind and body and energy flows across time and space to those we are thinking about. Thus, when we meditate in community, collective communal energy flows and we can change the collective consciousness.⁵⁵⁵

Buddhist meditation differs from Christian centering prayer. In Buddhism, meditation is focused on attaining deeper insight into the dharma principles of the impermanence of all things, the reality of no self and attaining enlightenment or *nirvana*. It requires concentration and intention. It requires focusing all of one’s energies on the present moment, how one dwells in this moment, and how one lives in relation to self, others and the larger world in this moment. It is focused on developing and practicing compassion and loving kindness for self and others. Centering prayer is a process of letting go of all images, ideas, thoughts, distractions or perceptions so that we may dwell in the presence of God.

Reflections

As we have seen, many college students today desire to develop a meaningful life philosophy, to discover meaning in one’s life and to discern how to live an authentic life with a commitment to serving the common good. In other words, they are hungry for spirituality. The search for authentic spirituality involves discerning how one can live

⁵⁵⁴ Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Energy of Prayer*, 39.

⁵⁵⁵ Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Energy of Prayer*, 54.

more fully in relation to oneself, our loved ones, our neighbors and God, the Divine or whatever one deems ultimate.

Spirituality involves engaging in introspection to uncover one's deepest longings and to discern how these desires may or may not be consistent with one's core values, beliefs, guiding principles and sense of self. It involves careful reflection about how to transform these desires so as to make them consistent to our core values and to live our lives as a reflection of these values. To live a spiritual life means to live with integrity. To live a spiritual life also means to live out one's commitment to self, others and community through one's choice of career if we are indeed privileged enough to be able to make this choice, in one's volunteer and civic commitments, and in one's relationships.

For young adults who identify as Christian, spirituality speaks to how one invites the Spirit of God into our hearts and minds so as to help us discern how to live as faithful disciples of Christ. As we open ourselves to encounters with the Spirit, we invite the Spirit to help us identify the movements of God in our daily lives and how our desires, thoughts, attitudes, behaviors and actions can reflect God's empowering, sustaining and compassionate love in the world. Through engagement in spiritual formation activities, we learn how to, as Rogers suggests, become partners in the dance of God.⁵⁵⁶ And as we dance, we discern our vocation or how God is calling us into service through our career and in all aspects of our lives.

Thus, encouraging college students to engage in spiritual formation activities such as spiritual practices should be a central piece of any program, initiative or ministry to

⁵⁵⁶ Rogers, Jr., "Dancing with Grace."

support young adults as they seek to identify how to live a life of deep purpose. For students who identify as Christian, regular engagement with the practices highlighted in this discussion can be truly life changing. Through discernment practices such as the Prayer of Examen, young people learn how to identify what gives their life meaning and how they can change in their daily lives in accordance with this discernment. Learning what gives one a sense of joy and purpose is key to identifying potential vocations.

These practices also teach young adults how to live life on a deeper level. Regular engagement in these practices helps them cultivate the capacity to ask deeper questions in the moment of their experience and feel the presence of Christ through out their day. Other practices such as centering prayer and the labyrinth teach young people to engage prayer as a form of listening. For many young people, this is a new approach to prayer. Cultivating the capacity to simply rest in the presence of God can be difficult for college students who are constantly in motion. But it can also be truly enriching and powerful.

In fact, the participants in this study who identified themselves as Christian described the important role many of these spiritual practices played and are continuing to play in their spiritual lives and vocational quests. Allen graduated from college in May 2012 and he is now working as a writing tutor at a community college. He is also serving as an unpaid religious advisor to one of the Christian groups at this same college. He is currently contemplating either becoming a minister or pursuing a PhD in Religious Studies.

Prior to the fellowship, Allen had been exposed to several contemplative practices such as *lectio divina* and deep listening but through the fellowship he learned additional

practices that he continues to engage today. In particular, he finds the Prayer of Examen and Praying the Questions to be very helpful. He observes: “My mind is naturally inclined toward reflection, but it is difficult for me to focus my reflections and too much unguided introspection overwhelms me. I benefited from having some structure to my prayer, and I found it to be a much more relaxing and freeing activity that way.” He also has come to value deep listening and *lectio divina* which he found inspiring. He notes “I loved the idea of God speaking to us through any moment, text, or piece of music; it made me want to renew my commitment to living life with eyes and ears wide open.” During our interview, Allen and I discussed other forms of Christian prayer including the Jesus Prayer and Brother Lawrence’s Praying Along the Way. He also observed how important it was for him to have a rule of life, especially during his time of transitioning from college into the world of work in a new community. He notes

without context and without community ... and all these things I kind of used to um piece my identity together, it’s easy to kind of forget my priorities, not my values as much, but just um the things that have been helpful in the past, things that have kept me spiritually or emotionally or socially grounded in the past. Um so to actually have ... the rule of life has ... been a good reminder from time to time when I need to look that up again and remember what exactly I was doing before and why I decided these things should be consistent in my life.

Elizabeth, who graduated in 2010, described learning the spiritual practices as very helpful. While she had been exposed to several of the practices before, she had only done them once or twice without really considering why they were important or how they could be used. She compared her prior experiences as “it’s like you’ve been given like a toy but don’t know how to play with it.” In particular, the Prayer of Examen helped her to become more aware of her healthy and unhealthy habits such as her need to be a perfectionist. Elizabeth continues to use the Prayer of Examen as a graduate student in

seminary and she has started a prayer group at her school. She found the labyrinth helpful because it made her become more mindful of how fast she tends to move and the beauty of slowing down.

However, the question remains as to what role, if any, these Christian practices can play in helping students who do not identify as Christian. Can these historic Christian practices help young adults who do not identify as Christians? Likewise, can Buddhist practices such as mindful meditation help individuals who do not identify as Buddhist? I think the answer to this question is both yes and no. I will highlight three ways in which I think we use historical practices to support nonreligious students.

First, regular engagement in contemplative practices helps one cultivate deeper inner awareness. Practices of discernment and contemplation teach us to ask ourselves tough questions about our true desires, motivations and longings. These practices teach us how to listen to our intuition, feelings, senses and spirit and to not just rely on analytical reason to make decisions. Likewise, practices help us identify personal biases, fears, or prejudices that prevent us from taking moral action. Thus, we become more aware of the passions, values and beliefs that shape our worldview, how these commitments may be destructive to oneself, our community and the larger world and what specific changes we can take in order to live with more coherence to our values.

As Lozoff suggests regular engagement in practices helps us answer the two most important questions:

1. What is my biggest view of life and my place in it? That is, what are my primary values?
2. What steps or behaviors are necessary to bring my daily existence into harmony with that view?⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵⁷ Lozoff, 27.

Second, practices teach us how to live in the present moment, how to use our thoughts, feelings, perceptions, energies and insights to live each moment to the fullest.

As Lozoff observes:

Our lives become a seamless whole, and every moment becomes our conscious practice. We accept life and life accepts us, and the fears, worries, and internal bickering of a lifetime fall away. Getting there is not always easy. But the joy and gratitude inherent in this spiritual awakening surpass any other kind of payoff life could possibly offer.⁵⁵⁸

Practices sustains us in times of turmoil and help us remember that we are part of something larger than ourselves. Practices help us live deeply connected to our true self, others and the world in which we live.

Third, practices serve as ethical or moral guides to remind us of our call to love and serve one another with compassion. As Wuthnow notes, through regular engagement in spiritual practices, we encounter the Divine or our source of ultimacy and we learn how evaluate our activities in relation to how we understand our relationship to this source and other beings.⁵⁵⁹ In this way, practices open us up to be moved by the feelings of empathy and compassion. As Wuthnow observes:

practices involve a shaping of the person as well—becoming habituated to the practice to the point that one can exercise wisdom when new situations necessitate making difficult judgments, learning how to get along with other practitioners, being willing to pay the costs that may be associated with one's principles, and knowing how to relate the practice responsibly to one's other obligations and areas of life.⁵⁶⁰

While individuals may withdraw from the world to engage in silence, solitude or contemplation, in these moments we find clarity about how we can better engage the world.

⁵⁵⁸ Lozoff, 21.

⁵⁵⁹ Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, 184.

⁵⁶⁰ Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, 184.

As Wuthnow notes:

By engaging in spiritual practices, the practitioner retreats reflectively from the world in order to recognize how it is broken and in need of healing; then, in recognition that the world is also worthy of healing because of its sacral dimensions, the practitioner commits energy to the process of healing.⁵⁶¹

At the same time, Christian practices are inherently Christian. These practices come from a rich history and tradition as modeled by Christian men and women who have come before us. Many of these practices can be traced to the very origins of our faith. When Christians engage in practices, we do so in communion with the Spirit who guides us through the particular steps of the practice and leads us to experience moments of insight and grace. Likewise, Buddhist practices of mindfulness such as meditation are part of a larger religious or spiritual philosophy about how one can seek enlightenment.

Thus, one must take great care when considering how to use these practices with integrity. We need to be careful that the broader purpose of these practices is communicated even as we go about teaching the particular movements or steps of a specific practice. We must emphasize this in order to prevent people from turning these historical practices into a series of self-help techniques that make one feel better but that fail to help one understand how she or he is connected to the larger world around them. Dykstra reminds us that practices “are ways of doing things together in which and through which human life is given direction, meaning and significance, and through which our very capacities to do good things well are increased.”⁵⁶² Practices are meant to change us so that we can in turn change the world.

Elaine L. Graham writes about the task of engaging in pastoral or practical

⁵⁶¹ Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, 197.

⁵⁶² Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith*, 69-70.

theology as transforming practice. While I will share more about the field and work of practical theology in the next chapter, I would like to highlight how we can draw upon Graham's work as we consider how to use practices in our work with young adults who may or may not identify as Christian, Buddhist or religious in any traditional way. Graham takes insights from postmodernism seriously with its critique of metanarratives, its rejection of universal truth claims, and its recognition of the social construction of knowledge and the self. She offers a postmodern commitment to "provisional, situated, embodied, non-essential and contingent" understandings of knowledge, subjectivity and agency.⁵⁶³

Graham believes that the practical theological task begins by reflecting upon the experiences and practices of a particular faith community. She describes practical theology as the "*critical phenomenology of pastoral practice*" that "excavates the horizons of value embedded in all intentional practices of faith and evaluates their continuity with historic forms of *praxis*, their appropriateness for the complexity of human experience and their viability as public and communitarian forms of practical wisdom."⁵⁶⁴ Postmodern pastoral theology helps us transform practices so as to disclose truth through experiences of transcendence which can in turn lead to healing, redemption and justice.⁵⁶⁵

One of the more compelling aspects of Graham's work is its focus on contextual knowledge and her suggestion that traditional practices and sources of knowledge can be changed based on localized understanding and values. I agree with Graham's suggestion

⁵⁶³ Elaine L. Graham, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 163.

⁵⁶⁴ Graham, 209. Italics in the original.

⁵⁶⁵ Graham, 209.

that we intentionally reflect upon the meaning, history, and tradition that informs these practices and her suggestion that practices may change due to contextual factors.

Thus, when I teach students a spiritual practice from a particular religious tradition, I explain the history of the practice, its purpose as defined by its religious or spiritual tradition, and how the practice fits within the larger framework of the tradition to which it belongs. This is my attempt to engage students in life-giving practices while at the same time preserving the historical authenticity of the practice.

The results of my interviews with a group of young adults indicates that it is possible to use contemplative practices from these historical religious traditions with students who do not identify as particularly religious. In fact, all fourteen participants in this study made observations about the importance of the contemplative practices. For some such as Melissa and Yvonne, the main thing engaging these practices taught them was the need to slow down, breathe and reflect upon what is important to them.

Melissa and Yvonne also described how the practices taught them about the need to tend to their emotional and spiritual well-being. While Melissa draws wisdom from Thich Nhat Hanh and mindfulness practices, Yvonne talked about how the labyrinth helps her to learn how to pace herself, quiet down, and consider what she needs to calm down her life to be happy and to help her identify what she needs to focus on in her life. And yet, I must confess that I continue to reflect upon how to teach a practice with integrity to its historic roots and tradition in a way that speaks to the concerns and questions of today's young adults.

CHAPTER 5

SUPPORTING COLLEGE STUDENT VOCATIONAL DISCERNMENT

Introduction

One of the central developmental tasks of young adulthood is to engage in the act of making meaning. During the young adult years, individuals critically examine the values, beliefs, perspectives and ideological commitments they have learned or acquired through trusted sources of authority including parents, relatives, teachers, religious leaders, friends, community, popular culture and society in general. While on campus, young people will question, challenge and perhaps ultimately reject some of these inherited notions as they compose their own systems of meaning based on personal wisdom as informed and shaped by intellectual inquiry, intuitive reflection and critical reflection on life experience. This developmental process is part of the larger developmental task of constructing an identity or a vital sense of self.

Recent research suggests that college students are engaging spiritual and religious questions as part of this effort. College students arrive on campus with the expectation that college will help them identify their values and develop a meaningful life philosophy. As the recent Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) spirituality study suggests, four out of five college students express interest in spirituality.⁵⁶⁶ The researchers also found that more than 80 percent of incoming first year students “report ‘to find purpose in my life’ is at least a ‘somewhat’ important reason for attending college.”⁵⁶⁷ Two out of three incoming freshman said “that it is either ‘very important’ or

⁵⁶⁶ Alexander W. Astin, Helen S. Astin, and Jennifer A. Lindholm, *Cultivating the Spirit: How College Can Enhance Students' Inner Lives* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 3.

⁵⁶⁷ Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, 3.

‘essential’ that college ‘helps you develop your personal values’ and enhances your self-understanding.’’⁵⁶⁸

Many young adults are seeking to identify a career that aligns with their gifts, strengths, passions, values, beliefs and ideological commitments. The search for meaningful work is part of a larger quest to live a life of deep purpose or a life of vocation. As Sharon Daloz Parks suggests,

Vocation conveys “calling” and meaningful purpose. It is a relational sensibility in which I recognize that what I do with my time, talents, and treasure is most meaningfully conceived not as a matter of personal passion and preference but in relationship to the whole of life.⁵⁶⁹

Thus, “(v)ocation arises from a deepening understanding of both self and world, which give rise to moments of power when self and purpose become aligned with eternity.”⁵⁷⁰

I have suggested that chaplains, interfaith directors, faculty, higher education administrators and other caring adults can support young adults during this time of great possibility and vulnerability through intentional engagement in spiritual practices. Through engagement in individual and communal practices of prayer, discernment, contemplation, hospitality and service, young people are able to pause, reflect, question and discern how they may live in authentic relationship to self, other and the Divine, God or their source of ultimacy.

Higher education professionals including student affairs professionals have become increasingly interested in how to support the spiritual development of college students as part of a holistic approach to undergraduate education. There is a growing

⁵⁶⁸ Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, 3.

⁵⁶⁹ Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 148. Italics in the original.

⁵⁷⁰ Parks, 148.

body of literature on how college administrators and faculty can help young adults examine their religious and spiritual values and beliefs and consider how to live a spiritually grounded life. The work by Jon C. Dalton and others through the Jon C. Dalton Institute on College Student Values at Florida State University regarding character education is one such example. Other institutions have entered into this conversation as part of the Lilly Endowment's Programs for the Theological Exploration of Vocation. More recently, colleges and universities are joining the Network for the Theological Exploration of Vocation, a network established by the Council of Independent Colleges with financial support from the Lilly Endowment.

Scholars are also identifying educational practices that can support spiritual growth. The HERI research team is now compiling information about programs and practices in higher education that foster student spiritual growth. Larry Braskamp, Lois Calian Trautvetter and Kelly Ward have examined how ten colleges address the holistic development of their students.⁵⁷¹ This includes spiritual growth. They define spirituality as "finding one's purpose in life through inner reflection and introspection and taking action. It includes prayer and meditation, commitment, performance, and connections with others."⁵⁷² They write that "being spiritual is to be socially and morally responsible."⁵⁷³

Their research suggests that colleges successfully engaging in this endeavor possess three characteristics. First, these institutions have incorporated spiritual growth

⁵⁷¹ Larry A. Braskamp, Lois Calian Trautvetter, and Kelly Ward, *Putting Students First: How College Develop Students Purposefully* (Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing Company, 2006).

⁵⁷² Braskamp, Trautvetter, and Ward, 23.

⁵⁷³ Braskamp, Trautvetter, and Ward, 23.

into the central mission of the college.⁵⁷⁴ This means that Presidents and senior campus leaders articulate a commitment to provide spiritual, moral and character education into their broader educational mission statement. Second, these institutions align curricular and co-curricular learning experiences in order to teach their students through a variety of methodologies.⁵⁷⁵ This also means embracing a variety of forms of knowledge including experiential knowledge. And, third, these institutions are committed to diversity and pluralism and fully embrace Parks' challenge to become mentoring communities.⁵⁷⁶ These initiatives hold great promise for the future of higher education.

The Fellowship

I serve as the Director for Religious and Spiritual Life at a small, secular liberal arts college. The mission of the Office for Religious and Spiritual Life is to support students, faculty, and staff in their pursuit of a vibrant and meaningful spiritual and religious life while engaging religious diversity with a commitment to acceptance, mutual respect and dialogue. Recognizing that spiritual reflection is integral to the cultivation of the whole person, our office sponsors programs to help students explore spirituality, religion, ethics, moral development, social justice, responsible community engagement, religious diversity and the pursuit of meaningful work. We help students explore the question: How does my spiritual development intersect with my intellectual growth? We encourage students to engage the big questions concerning truth, morality, religious beliefs and meaning.

For the last five years, I have administered a fellowship through which students

⁵⁷⁴ Braskamp, Trautvetter, and Ward, 194-199.

⁵⁷⁵ Braskamp, Trautvetter, and Ward, 200-207.

⁵⁷⁶ Braskamp, Trautvetter, and Ward, 207-215.

explore the intersection of social justice and spirituality.⁵⁷⁷ This program incorporates service learning, spiritual practice and small group discussion. There are three different ways students enroll in this program. We offer a total of fourteen fellowships each semester during the academic school year. Fellows may participate for one or two semesters. These students work eight to ten hours a week on a social justice project at a community organization and receive a stipend for this work. They also attend a weekly seminar in which they engage in reflection exercises and small and large group discussions and learn different spiritual practices. As a third option, three students are selected to participate in an eight week summer fellowship. These students work 40 hours per week and attend the seminar. They receive both a stipend and free room and board if they live on campus.

The central premise of the fellowship is that people engaged in social justice work need a vibrant spiritual life to sustain their work over a lifetime. The overall objectives of the fellowship program are to:

- Teach students a variety of spiritual practices aimed at reflection, contemplation, meditation, and responsible engagement with transcendence.
- Support students in exploring a spiritual practice that corresponds to their values and beliefs and that supports and nourishes their work to make social change.
- Provide an opportunity on an ongoing and reliable basis—through weekly seminars—for students to explore challenges, difficulties, doubts, frustrations and insights related to their spiritual development and their work commitments.
- Build students' understanding of the term “spiritual” by exploring the mystical traditions of world religions as well as popular uses of spirituality and personal exploration.
- Equip students with an understanding of the spiritual resources within and beyond themselves in order to sustain a life committed to serving the common good.

Students from all religious and spiritual traditions, including those who do not

⁵⁷⁷ This fellowship has been made possible through funding from the Angell Foundation located in Los Angeles, CA.

identify with a specific tradition, are welcome to participate in the fellowship. Students are selected based on the quality of their written applications and faculty recommendations.⁵⁷⁸ All potential fellows must demonstrate a commitment to interfaith dialogue and express interest in exploring issues related to spirituality, religion, social justice and vocation.

Specific learning objectives of the seminar follow.

- Students will identify their religious or spiritual, political and cultural values and beliefs.
- Students will identify their strengths, interests and passions.
- Students will identify their vocational goals as informed by their values, beliefs, strengths, interests and passions.
- Students will identify and access information to pursue their vocational goals.
- Students will learn spiritual practices aimed at reflection, contemplation and responsible engagement.
- Students will identify challenges, difficulties and insights related to their spiritual development and work commitments and discern how to address these concerns in healthy ways.
- Students will develop an understanding of the spiritual resources within and beyond themselves to sustain a life committed to serving the common good. This includes developing a spiritual practice (rule of life).

The seminar is structured into five sections focused on these questions: (1) Who am I? (2) What is spirituality? (3) What is social justice? (4) What is the relationship between spirituality and social justice? and, (5) What am I called to do?

(1) *Who am I?* Fellows engage in values clarification exercises and identify their passions, interests and commitments through personal storytelling and contemplative practices such as the Prayer of Examen (the Attentiveness Practice), deep listening and mindful walking meditation. Students also take the Clifton StrengthsFinder assessment, offered by the Gallup Organization, to identify their strengths. We discuss how students

⁵⁷⁸ In fall 2012, I added an interview as part of the application process because of the high number of applicants. I will probably incorporate interviews permanently into the selection process.

can utilize their strengths in their personal relationships and academic work and to identify meaningful careers.

(2) *What is spirituality?* Students investigate how they understand religion and spirituality, identify their religious or spiritual beliefs and practices and consider the relationship between their spirituality and social justice. To stimulate discussion, students read books on spirituality and vocation. Over the years, students have read *It's a Meaningful Life: It Just Takes Practice* by Bo Lozoff, selected chapters of *The Active Life: A Spirituality of Work, Creativity and Caring* by Parker J. Palmer, and *Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life* or *Happiness* by Thich Nhat Hanh. Students also engage in spiritual practices such as walking the labyrinth, mandalas, *lectio divina*, guided prayer or meditation on ultimate questions, prayers for the world and other practices.

(3) *What is social justice?* Students participate in contemplative practices and discussion to deepen their understanding of social justice. Students identify mentors who have taught them about justice and consider how these people live out their commitment to justice. The fellows also consider how they live out (or not) a commitment to justice in their daily lives, how their justice commitment can inform their career choice and how to sustain themselves spiritually, emotionally and physically as they engage in justice work. These conversations usually include discussion on how to create and sustain community and how to participate in justice work as a person of privilege.

(4) *What is the relationship between spirituality and social justice?* Students are challenged to identify how they understand the relationship between religion or spirituality and social justice. This typically includes conversations about how one's

religious or spiritual beliefs may inspire a person to work for justice and how regular engagement in spiritual practices can sustain people as they engage in this work.

Students also discuss the tension between social activism and service.

(5) *What am I called to do?* As the culminating assignment for the fellowship, each student writes his or her own personal rule of life. This practice is based on the concept of a rule of prayer. Students: (1) identify particular spiritual practices that they would like regularly engage; (2) name important values and beliefs; (3) describe how they intend to nurture their spiritual, emotional and physical well-being; and, (4) identify how they would like to live out their commitment to justice and live a purposeful life.

Religious Education Theory and Practice

The first year of the fellowship was directed by the previous Director for Religious and Spiritual Life. When I became the Director, I revised the structure of the weekly seminar in light of my training as both a congregational pastor and a PhD student in Practical Theology. I developed the seminar curriculum using insights from bell hooks, Parker J. Palmer, Kathleen T. Talvacchia, Sharon Daloz Parks and the practical theology faculty at the Claremont School of Theology.

bell hooks offers an engaged pedagogical approach to education which she named after Thich Nhat Hanh's Engaged Buddhism.⁵⁷⁹ Engaged pedagogy is based on Thich Nhat Hanh's concept of *interbeing* which is the process of becoming aware of one's mind, body and feelings in the present moment in order to discern how all living beings are deeply interconnected. hooks writes that "(w)hen we practice interbeing in the classroom we are transformed not just by one individual's presence but by our collective

⁵⁷⁹ bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 173.

presence.”⁵⁸⁰

hooks describes engaged pedagogy as “progressive, holistic education” that focuses on the well-being of both teacher and student.⁵⁸¹ In engaged pedagogy, “teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students.”⁵⁸² This is because engaged pedagogy seeks to empower both student and teacher and understands “education as the practice of freedom.”⁵⁸³ Other values of engaged pedagogy include a commitment to practicing classroom hospitality so that students and teachers may learn from each other’s vulnerability, teaching critical theory and engaging in critical reflection to confront racism, sexism, classicism and other systems of domination at the systemic, interpersonal and personal levels and a commitment to pluralism.

Both hooks and I draw wisdom from Palmer. Palmer focuses on the relationship between student, teacher and truth. He suggests that “to teach is to create a space in which the community of truth is practiced” through which student and teacher engage in the mutual exploration for truth.⁵⁸⁴ hooks and Palmer emphasize that knowing is a relational and communal activity.⁵⁸⁵ Palmer links his epistemological theory to Martin Buber’s notion of the *I-Thou* relationship between human beings and God.⁵⁸⁶ Palmer writes that when we understand truth as personal or relational, then “(w)e will find truth

⁵⁸⁰ hooks, *Teaching Community*, 173-174.

⁵⁸¹ bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 15.

⁵⁸² hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 15.

⁵⁸³ hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 21.

⁵⁸⁴ Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of A Teacher’s Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 95.

⁵⁸⁵ Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, 54.

⁵⁸⁶ Parker J. Palmer, *To Know As We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 49-50.

not in the fine points of our theologies or in our organizational allegiances but in the quality of our relationships—with each other and with the whole created world.”⁵⁸⁷

Kathleen T. Talvacchia discusses a multicultural pedagogy that incorporates theological reflection, critical thinking and a commitment to social justice.⁵⁸⁸ Talvacchia emphasizes the spirituality of hospitality as the center for teaching for transformation. She describes how educators should create a classroom environment in which each student feels empowered to share his or her truths. In particular her insights on how teachers who are members of the dominant culture can be intimidating to students from marginalized communities are very helpful. She invites me to remember that while I should model openness and respect in my teaching, I cannot force students to receive my hospitality. Talvacchia focuses on multiculturalism but I find her work to be very helpful in an interfaith and secular setting where I work with students who have been wounded because of bias expressed by religious people or institutions because of their sexual orientation, race, gender or other identities or with students from a variety of religious traditions.

While these educators inform how I engage in the practice of teaching, the person who has most influenced the curriculum of the seminar is Sharon Daloz Parks. The fellowship is based upon her vision of how mentors and mentoring communities can support young adults as they deconstruct and recompose meaning. Parks highlights the role of imagination in the act of constructing meaning. She identifies five basic

⁵⁸⁷ Palmer, *To Know As We Are Known*, 50.

⁵⁸⁸ Kathleen T. Talvacchia, *Critical Minds and Discerning Hearts: A Spirituality of Multicultural Teaching* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2003).

movements of imagination as meaning making.⁵⁸⁹ As young adults are exposed to life experiences that challenge their personal assumptions, values or beliefs (conscious conflict), they are invited to stop to consider what is happening (pause). As they engage in this reflection, they discern new insight or perspective (image), revise their perceptions, beliefs or insights (repattern) and share their new insights within a supportive community (interpretation or testimony).

Parks invites faculty and higher education professionals to become mentors who support and challenge students as they engage in constructing meaning. She highlights qualities of good mentors. She writes that “(g)ood mentors know that all knowledge has a moral dimension, and learning that matters is ultimately a spiritual, transforming activity, intimately linked with the whole of life.”⁵⁹⁰ Mentors recognize, support, challenge and inspire students through dialogical methods while remaining aware of their fallibility and resisting the temptation to mold students into replicas of themselves.⁵⁹¹

Parks advocates that colleges and universities become mentoring communities or learning environments of mutuality and support. She writes:

Mentoring communities are particularly essential to the formation of adult faith. Since young adulthood is a time of critically recomposing a sense of self and world and the nature of the ultimate-intimate reality that holds both, the young adult imagination is appropriately dependent upon a network of belonging that can confirm a worthy, ‘owned’ faith. When necessary, the same community must contradict the composing of a weaker faith, one unable to stand up to the challenges of the diverse and morally complex world in which today’s young adults live out their adulthood.⁵⁹²

Mentoring communities encourage students to engage their moral imagination.

⁵⁸⁹ Parks, 104-126.

⁵⁹⁰ Parks, 128.

⁵⁹¹ Parks, 128-134.

⁵⁹² Parks, 135.

She argues that this is crucial for both our students and society. She observes that

(a) strong, empathic, moral imagination—not just on behalf of the self but on behalf of the other as well—is increasingly critical to the practice of citizenship and the vocation of a faithful adulthood in a world marked by social diversity and the awareness of suffering on a global scale.⁵⁹³

Mentoring communities honor all forms of knowing, not just rational thought based on empirical fact and “objective reality.”⁵⁹⁴ This includes learning from one’s own life experiences. These communities also challenge harmful and alienating social and cultural norms.

Parks identifies seven characteristics of mentoring communities. First, these communities offer “a trustworthy network of belonging” that both affirm and challenge student learning.⁵⁹⁵ Second, these communities create space for students to engage life’s questions of meaning and purpose and challenge students who resist engaging difficult questions.⁵⁹⁶ Third, mentoring communities seek to cultivate compassion and a commitment to diversity in young adults by creating transformative encounters with “otherness” that force students to confront their fears, biases and assumptions.⁵⁹⁷

Fourth, mentoring communities cultivate “habits of the mind” or create opportunities for students to engage in authentic dialogue, strengthen their critical thinking skills, develop “connective-holistic awareness and develop the contemplative mind.”⁵⁹⁸ This includes creating opportunities for pause.

⁵⁹³ Parks, 124.

⁵⁹⁴ Parks, 160. In fact, Parks raises questions about the notion of objective truth.

⁵⁹⁵ Parks, 135.

⁵⁹⁶ Parks, 137-139.

⁵⁹⁷ Parks, 139-142.

⁵⁹⁸ Parks, 142.

She writes:

Pause is powerful for young adults because it encourages cultivation of the inner life, honors the emerging inner authority of the young adult, and activates the awareness that he or she participates in the motion of life that transcends one's own efforts to manage and control, a reality larger than the scope of one's ego.⁵⁹⁹

Mentoring communities also encourage students to consider their vocational dreams and hopes for the future. She observes that

(v)ocation arises from a deepening understanding of both self and world, which give rise to moments of power when self and purpose become aligned with eternity. Vocation is the place where the heart's deep gladness meets the world's deep hunger.⁶⁰⁰

Mentoring communities foster hope by nurturing their students' sense of self.⁶⁰¹ This includes providing alternative images of truth, mutuality and wholeness. Finally, these communities engage in communal practices of hospitality to promote authentic conversation and community.⁶⁰² Thus, "mentoring environments are communities of imagination that distinctively serve young adult meaning-making and the formation of vocation and faith."⁶⁰³

Through the weekly seminar, I attempt to create a welcoming environment in which students support, affirm, and at times, challenge, each other as together, we seek to understand the relationship between social justice and spirituality and as the students engage in vocational discernment. I have attempted to create a small mentoring community that possesses a commitment to compassion, mutuality, interbeing and

⁵⁹⁹ Parks, 145-146.

⁶⁰⁰ Parks, 148. Parks paraphrases Frederick Buechner's famous quote about vocation. Buechner writes: "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." See Frederick Buechner, "Vocation," in *Leading Lives That Matter: What We Should Do and Who We Should Be*, eds. Mark R. Schwehn and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 111-112.

⁶⁰¹ Parks, 151-152.

⁶⁰² Parks, 154-157.

⁶⁰³ Parks, 157.

pluralism. I seek to accomplish this through my presence as the discussion leader and the use of particular pedagogical practices.

The practice of mutual invitation is critical.⁶⁰⁴ This is a process of facilitating dialogue to promote mutuality and to prevent one person from dominating the conversation. Through this process, the facilitator first asks and then answers a question and invites the next speaker by name. This person may answer the question or pass and invites the next speaker. I continue to receive positive feedback about this process because of the way in which it equalizes the power dynamics in the group. We also use dialogue guidelines I developed based on the practice of deep listening. These are included in Appendix A. And, I try to make sure that we engage some form of spiritual practice or storytelling each week. At the end of the year, we celebrate by having dinner at my house. Recently I have started to meet with former fellows who remain on campus after participating in the program individually and as a group to engage in spiritual check ins. I have also created an online discussion forum so that former fellows can communicate with one another about concerns unique to the themes and experiences of the fellowship.

Practical Theology and The Research Project

The purpose of this practical theological research project is to examine how college chaplains, administrators and faculty can support the vocational discernment of young adults. My understanding of practical theology is informed by a number of practical theologians, several of whom I highlight here. Bonnie Miller-McLemore

⁶⁰⁴ Mutual invitation was developed by Eric H.F. Law. For more information, see Eric H.F. Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1993.)

suggests that practical theology is: “(1) a *field* of study; (2) a *method* of doing theology that extends beyond the field to other academic areas and to ministry; and, (3) an *activity* of faithful practitioners in families, religious communities, and wider public spheres.”⁶⁰⁵ As a field, practical theology “asks what it means to practice theology and to live one’s faith in the here and now.”⁶⁰⁶ Practical theologians agree that as a method, practical theology centers on practice “as a key subject matter.”⁶⁰⁷ As an activity, practical theology, “attends to actual problems that profoundly shape lives” to transform the lives of individuals, communities, societies and the larger world.⁶⁰⁸

Terry A. Veling addresses practical theology as a vocation, “a way of life” and as justice seeking activity.⁶⁰⁹ He writes that practical theology focuses on human activity in response to the call of God. He suggests that practical theology gives priority to human agency and that who we are emerges through activity.⁶¹⁰ Activity is the starting point for human understanding. Veling invites us “*to live theologically*” by which he means we should ask “how the practices of my life can be made theological.”⁶¹¹ Veling’s understanding of practical theology is informed by his commitment to Catholic liberation theology and his belief in God’s preferential option for the poor. He sees our responsibility as Christians is to offer mercy to the brokenhearted, to seek liberation for the oppressed and to work for systemic social change by confronting the reality of

⁶⁰⁵ Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, “Practical Theology” in *The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology*, eds. Dawn DeVries and Brian Gerrish (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Know Press, forthcoming), 1. Italics in the original.

⁶⁰⁶ Miller-McLemore, 3.

⁶⁰⁷ Miller-McLemore, 4.

⁶⁰⁸ Miller-McLemore, 5.

⁶⁰⁹ Terry A. Veling, *Practical Theology: “On Earth as It Is in Heaven”* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 3.

⁶¹⁰ Veling, 86.

⁶¹¹ Veling, 141. Italics in the original.

structural or social sin.

Feminist practical theologian Rebecca S. Chopp also informs my work. Chopp seeks to transform practical theology and theological education.⁶¹² She suggests that practices of narrativity, ekklesiality and theology as saving work should be integrated into theological education. Narrativity practices help free students from definitions of the self imposed upon them by others. Chopp argues that theological education needs to incorporate feminist theology and practices to transform it and the church “into a new nature and mission as ekklesia.”⁶¹³ Embracing theology as saving work is an invitation to incorporate feminist theology’s mission to reconstruct theology and to challenge the church to respond to the concerns of a broken humanity and creation.⁶¹⁴

Elaine L. Graham’s notion of pastoral or practical theology as transforming practice is very important as I consider how to engage in practical theology at a secular liberal arts college.⁶¹⁵ Graham offers a postmodern practical theology based on insights from critical theory such as a recognition of the social construction of knowledge and the self, and a rejection of existence of universal ethical or moral principles and metanarratives. She defines the practical theological task as helping local congregations to critically reflect upon its practices to identify oppressive ideologies behind these practices and to develop new provisional truth claims that can transform these practices.

These practical theologians inform how I engage in my work as an educator and practical theologian. Specifically, the fellowship focuses on how students can learn from

⁶¹² Rebecca S. Chopp, *Saving Work: Feminist Practices of Theological Education* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998).

⁶¹³ Chopp, 46.

⁶¹⁴ Chopp, 84.

⁶¹⁵ Elaine L. Graham, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002).

their experiences in a community organization and through mutually informative dialogue that challenges them to reconstruct their political, ethical and theological beliefs in light of these experiences and to seriously consider their role in promoting social justice through their daily decisions and choice of vocation. All of this work is focused on how these young adults may authentically live out their commitment to love, compassion, service and mutuality in relationship with others and the Divine or their source of ultimacy.

In terms of the research goals of this project, I draw upon practical theological research methods to discern how this fellowship that employs community-based learning, regular engagement in spiritual practice and critical dialogical reflection fosters student vocational discernment and deepens their understanding of what it means to live a meaningful life. I use a dialogical method in which bibliographic and qualitative research engage in critical conversation. I examine literature from the fields of human development theory, theology, spirituality, Christian spirituality, practical theology and religious education.

I also conduct qualitative research using a phenomenological approach. John Swinton and Harriet Mowat remind us that as a philosophy of experience, phenomenology “attempts to understand the ways in which meaning is constructed in and through human experience. This perspective views a person’s *lived experience* (the thing in itself) of and within the world as the foundation of meaning.”⁶¹⁶ Thus, the goal of phenomenology is to understand “what an experience means to a person quite apart from any theoretical overlay that might be put on it by the researcher and to provide a

⁶¹⁶ John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 106. Italics in the original.

comprehensive and rich description of it.”⁶¹⁷

My goal is to develop rich insights into the lived experiences of young adults who have participated in the fellowship. To this end, I conducted fourteen interviews of recent graduates who participated in the fellowship between 2009 and 2012. Prior to each interview, I sent the participants a pre-interview questionnaire to complete to prepare us both for the interview. The questionnaire can be found in Appendix B. I conducted three telephone interviews and eleven in-person interviews.

I interviewed twelve women and two men between the ages of 22 and 26. These young adults graduated from the same small liberal arts college between the years 2009 and 2012. The participants were asked to share their racial or ethnic identity. Based on their self-identification, the group is comprised of ten White young adults, one Chicano young man, one Hispanic young woman, one young woman who identifies as multi-racial (Nepali with Sherpa and Jewish American roots) and one young woman who identifies as Afro-Caribbean and Irish. The group includes four Urban and Environmental Policy majors, three Critical Theory and Social Justice majors, two English and Comparative Literature majors, two Psychology majors and one each in the majors of Religious Studies, Politics, and Studio Arts/Premed.

Students may participate in fellowship for one or two semesters during the academic year or in an eight-week summer program. Students may apply and participate in the fellowship more than once. Among the fourteen interviewees, eight participated for a full academic year, six participated in the program for just one semester and three participated in the summer program. Three students participated in the Fellowship twice.

⁶¹⁷ Swinton and Mowat, 106.

A brief biography of each of the interviewees follows.

Melissa graduated with a degree in Urban and Environmental Policy in May 2012 at the age of 22. Melissa identified her racial identity as Caucasian. She was a fellow during the summer of 2011 and the spring 2012 semester. Both times, Melissa worked for Planned Parenthood. While Melissa was not raised in a religious or spiritual tradition and does not identify with a tradition now, she credits her participation in the fellowship for teaching her the value of slowing down and engaging in reflection. She also finds support from Thich Nhat Hanh and mindfulness which she learned about through the fellowship. Melissa would like to receive either a Masters or PhD in Public Health. She is considering becoming a professor at a small liberal arts college. At the time of her interview, Melissa had just graduated and she was planning on spending the year traveling before either getting a job or applying for graduate school.

Allen is a 22-year-old Caucasian young man who graduated in May 2012 with a degree in English and Comparative Literary Studies. Allen participated in the fellowship during the spring of 2012 and tutored young children at a neighborhood community center. Allen was raised in a Christian household in which he and his family often discussed faith and regularly engaged in prayer and Scripture reading. In fact, Allen spent part of his childhood in Afghanistan where his parents engaged in medical work as Christian missionaries. Allen was active in a nondenominational Christian student organization while on campus and he is currently serving as a religious advisor to a similar group on a community college campus. Allen is contemplating becoming an ordained pastor or a professor of religious studies with a focus on the New Testament. He spends a lot of his personal time reading Christian spiritual classics and theological

books.

Sophia, a Caucasian 24-year-old, graduated from college in 2010 with a degree in Studio Art with an interest in attending medical school. She participated in the fellowship for an entire academic year after spending her winter break and summer breaks in post-Katrina New Orleans. Her fellowship work site was with Families to Amend the Three Strike laws. At the time of our interview, she was the Program Director for a nonprofit organization that hosts service learning trips for youth to the Grand Canyon. While Sophia would occasionally attend a Congregational Christian church with her mother while growing up, her parents rarely talked about religion and she does not claim to have been raised in a religious household. Sophia does not identify with a particular religious or spiritual tradition today but she does recognize the importance of spirituality in her life. During her interview, Sophia noted that while she “wouldn’t necessarily identify as a particularly religious person,” she identifies “with being part of a larger whole” and she is “in the process of identifying what a Higher Power is to” her, a process she believes she will engage her entire life.

Ricardo, a 24-year-old Chicano young man, graduated in 2011 with a degree in Politics. He participated in the fellowship during the 2010-2011 academic year and worked with the Education Rights Unit of the Children Rights Project at Public Counsel Law Center. He is currently a farm worker justice research fellow for a nonprofit organization in Washington, D.C. He plans to earn a joint degree in law and public policy and to work on behalf of the labor, immigration, and education rights of the Latino community, by combining impact litigation with policy analysis. Ricardo was raised Roman Catholic but he considers his Catholicism to be more of a cultural than a religious

identity. During our interview, Ricardo described how his grandmother took Catholic rituals very seriously and the influence this had on his upbringing since she lived with his family. He remembers she would bless him in Spanish every day before he went off to school. On his questionnaire, Ricardo noted that “Even though I don’t practice Catholicism, I still consider myself Catholic. I haven’t been to mass in about four years but I think I am a fairly spiritual person.”

Nancy is a 24-year-old woman who currently lives in San Francisco, California but who spent most of her childhood in Nepal. Nancy graduated with a degree in Critical Theory and Social Justice in 2010. Nancy identifies as multiracial as her mother is Nepali (Sherpa) and her father is Jewish American. She is a practicing Nyingma Buddhist which she began to practice at the age of nine when her family moved back to Nepal after living in England and Hong Kong. She participated in a summer fellowship under the direction of the previous Director for Religious and Spiritual Life when she worked for an environmental education community organization and for two semesters during her senior year (2009-2010) when she worked for two different community groups to provide young children access to art education. While she currently works as an administrative assistant at a Catholic high school, she plans to pursue a Masters Degree in Global Health or Women’s Health. She would like to work in the fields of reproductive justice, women’s health or health work in relation to tropical disease. Her vocational dream is to open a health clinic for women and members of the LGBTQI community in her hometown of Kathmandu, Nepal.

Rachel, a 26-year-old Caucasian young woman, is currently a case manager at a nonprofit mental health agency in Los Angeles. She graduated from college in 2010 as a

Critical Theory and Social Justice major. She plans to attend graduate school to pursue a Masters Degree in Social Work. Rachel was raised by Catholic parents who did not agree with Catholicism's values but were attached to Catholic rituals. Her mother also exposed her to Yoga and spiritual books including the work of Parker J. Palmer. Rachel was actively engaged in Yoga, Buddhist meditation and deep listening prior to the fellowship. Rachel transferred to this college after attending a small East Coast college for one year and taking another year off. During her year off, she lived for an extended period of time at a spirituality center in New England where she learned about mindfulness, Yoga and meditation and discussed many of the topics considered in the fellowship. Rachel participated in the eight-week summer fellowship and worked for a community organization that is trying to make Yoga accessible to at-risk and low income youth. She has returned to the fellowship several times after graduating to teach Yoga to later fellows.

Stephanie, a 23-year-old Hispanic woman, is currently working as a job coach for mentally disabled adults. She graduated in 2011 with a degree in English and Comparative Literary Studies. She participated in the fellowship during the 2009-2010 academic year and worked in the injury prevention department of a local hospital. Stephanie was raised as a Jehovah's Witness but her family stopped attending meetings after a falling out with the elders. Her family did not attend church regularly while she was growing up but they did encourage her to pray and read Scripture. Stephanie became active with one of the Christian student groups while on campus and now identifies herself as Christian. In fact, she has become very involved in a local non-denominational Christian congregation where she participates on the worship leadership team. Stephanie

is exploring returning to school to earn a degree in counseling so that she may become a school counselor.

Yvonne is a 23-year-old woman who describes herself as Afro-Caribbean/Irish. She graduated in 2012 as an Urban and Environmental Policy major and she currently works as a reproductive health specialist in San Francisco. She participated in the fellowship for one semester and worked for the Los Angeles Downtown Women's Center. While she was on campus, Yvonne worked at an Intercultural Center and lived in a multicultural hall where she became involved in campus programming around issues of diversity and cross cultural awareness. While she was raised in a Catholic family, she does not currently identify as Catholic. Yvonne describes spirituality as "your grounding point for life, a space of balance that reconnects you with your values and your ideas on how to live a free and inspired life." Further, she notes that "(r)eligion offers a point of reflection to maintain happiness, safety, respect and personal growth."

Samantha, a 22-year-old Caucasian woman, graduated in May 2012 with a degree in Critical Theory and Social Justice. She currently lives in Seattle where, at the time of our interview, she worked as a medical department executive assistant at a community health center. Samantha participated in the fellowship during her senior year (2011-2012) and worked with Voice for Equality, an organization that advocates for the rights of the LGBTQ community. Samantha was not raised in a religious home and does not identify with a particular religious tradition but she does engage religious and spiritual questions including the presence of a "higher" power, gods, spirits and angels. She notes that prior to the fellowship, she did not engage in intentional reflection or contemplative practices but that she values these experiences now.

Elizabeth, a 23-year-old Caucasian woman, graduated from college in 2011 with a degree in Psychology. She is currently in her first year of graduate school in seminary and plans to receive a degree in clinical psychology. Elizabeth participated in the fellowship during the 2010-2011 academic year where she interned in the young adult ministry program of a local Foursquare Church. This work experience and her participation the fellowship had a powerful influence on Elizabeth's vocational path and confirmed her interest in Christian counseling. As a child, she attended Lutheran, Presbyterian and non-denominational Christian churches. She is currently engaged in intense reading about the nature and meaning of human suffering, existentialism and faith.

Kimberly is a 23-year-old Caucasian woman who graduated with an Urban and Environmental Policy degree in 2011. She is currently a seventh grade reading teacher in Denver through the Teach for America program. Kimberly participated in the 2010 summer fellowship and worked at the Los Angeles Community Action Network (LACAN), a nonprofit organization that works with low income and homeless men and women. While Kimberly was not raised in a religious or spiritual tradition and does not identify with a specific tradition now, she does engage in spiritual reflection and contemplative practices. She noted during her interview that she valued participating in the fellowship because it broadened her understanding of spirituality and that she now considers herself to be a spiritual person.

Alexandra, a 25-year-old Caucasian woman, is currently a graduate student in interpersonal psychology. She graduated from college in 2009 with a degree in Psychology. She participated in the fellowship for one semester under the direction of

the previous Religious Life Director and then for the 2008-2009 year under my supervision. Her first work site was as project director at a community meal program hosted in a local church and her second project was to teach Yoga to people in cancer treatment and recovery at a community wellness center. Alexandra had a very interesting religious and spiritual upbringing. She was born in Russia and baptized in the Russian Orthodox church. With the fall of the Soviet Union, she immigrated to the United States and was confirmed as an Episcopalian. At the same time, she became interested in Eastern religions as a teenager and started practicing Yoga at the age of 16 which initiated a journey into Hatha Yoga and Tantric philosophy. She describes her current spiritual life as “eclectic but pretty central to my life.” Over the years, she has studied various yogic paths (Raja, Bhakti, Hatha, Karma, Tantra). As of today, she writes

I think ultimately I align with a Tantric Yoga perspective that is much like animism—a path that acknowledges the sacred in all of life, nature, and the body rather than seeking transcendence from these things. I have also become pretty involved in the Native American Church through sweat lodge and prayer ceremonies. The nature and community based way of spirituality resonates for me and seems to have a synergistic relationship to a yogic lifestyle.

In sum, I guess I identify with different spiritual traditions depending on the context and am now seeking an integration of my various spiritual practices into a coherent identity.

Alexandra is currently a life coach and she is interested in working with college students around vocational and spiritual development through experiential and group-based education.

Julia, a 25-year-old Caucasian woman, graduated with a degree in Religious Studies in 2009. She describes being raised in an untraditional Catholic environment. She does not call herself religious today but considers herself to be “very spiritual, in a very Taoist way.” She prays regularly, sometimes meditates, but she does not “have an

easily definable spiritual identity.” She participated in the fellowship during the spring of her senior year (2009) and worked at an afterschool program for low-income students in Pasadena. She provided homework assistance and taught a creative writing class to 5th and 6th grade students. Julia recently became a software engineer in San Francisco. While she appreciates the financial security of this field, Julia “would like to find a way to apply these [programming] skills to something more meaningful and to get a job that uses technology to advance education or grassroots politics, and make a lasting and positive impact on the world.”

Kylie graduated from college in 2011 with a degree in Urban and Environmental Policy. A 23-year-old Caucasian young woman, Kylie is currently employed as a paralegal for an immigrants rights organization in Los Angeles. Kylie participated in the fellowship for one semester where she worked for the Los Angeles Community Action Network (LACAN). She was raised in the Episcopalian tradition and regularly attended church with her family growing up. She grew up with “very sound concerns about (in)justice, a link to nature and the importance of charity.” While she was not necessarily encouraged to pursue spirituality, when she expressed interest in Yoga and eastern religions, her parents were very encouraging. Today, she loosely identifies with the Zen Buddhist tradition. She continues to contemplate a variety of spiritual questions and engages in spiritual practices that she learned about or had a powerful experience with through the fellowship.

Overall Analysis of the Fellowship Experience

All fourteen study participants expressed gratitude for the fellowship. All of them

would recommend the program to other students and several described the program as the highlight of their college experience. Two former fellows suggested that the program be offered at other schools. One of these students, Yvonne, appreciated the experiential learning aspect of the program and she thought that “the fellowship did a really good job” of helping her engage in self-reflection and to discern why her education matters to her. Likewise, the fellowship taught her not to give herself away to just any activity but to focus on activities that foster personal growth. She described why she values the fellowship on her pre-interview questionnaire in this way:

this is an amazing experience that gets you out into the community to explore work experiences while being able to reflect on them in a close group where you can share and learn from other people. Having the opportunity to reflect and learn practices that maintain your value system so that you do not “burn out” from work allows you to know that you can live a meaningful life if you have reflective tools to be able to understand your own personal needs and values to live a life that reflects growth, happiness and connection to something bigger than oneself.

A second interviewee, Elizabeth, described the program as a gift and expressed gratitude “to have had that space to connect with people from different backgrounds over really deep topics of spirituality and social justice.” Alexandra agreed that the fellowship was an important and unique program on campus. She concluded her pre-interview survey in this way:

It was a rare space in an academic college environment in which I felt I could explore my spiritual questions or even assert myself as a spiritual being. This alone was immensely meaningful to me. It also served as a bridge between exploring social justice oriented work in the world and my developing sense of self. Thinking back, the group felt partially like a support group and fulfilled a therapeutic purpose in my life. I think programs like this are essential to the holistic development of young adults and should be made available to all college students. Honestly, I feel like the program was so vital for me that I feel compelled to direct my career in a way that allows me to contribute to this kind of work.

Sophia wrote and spoke about the impact of the program on her life. She concluded her pre-interview questionnaire by writing that “I do not want to imagine where I would be in my life without the guidance of this program.” During her interview, she re-iterated her appreciation for the fellowship and in particular, the weekly seminar saying:

I’m just really appreciative of this opportunity and the way that it has and will continue to help me in later life. I think it really has helped me come to that conclusion that ... I value my vocation and what I’m doing and it’s not necessarily in the sense that I have to have a certain job but the way that I interact with the people around me is what is important in my life. And, I think it would have taken me a lot longer to come to that conclusion if I had not had the opportunity to do the seminar.

On her pre-interview survey, Samantha described the fellowship as “one of the most fruitful, engaging, and enjoyable experiences” that she had in college. She expanded upon these comments during our interview. In particular, she talked about how the seminar taught her the value of simply focusing on her place in the world. She commented during her interview that prior to the fellowship, she never reflected about what was important in her life. She said that

I never really took time um to think about things that weren’t related to something more tangible like getting an assignment done or applying to some program or, you know, even things that ... are important to take ... time ... for like I’m gonna go have coffee with this person. But now I think I make more of an effort to just set aside time for me to think about my just my relationship with everything. I don’t even really know how to articulate it but just my presence in the world.

Understandings of Vocation and Meaningful Life

During the interviews, I asked the former fellows about how they understood the concept of vocation or what it means to live a life of purpose and to describe the particular things that would make their life meaningful. While it was hard for some of

the interviewees to offer a short, coherent description of vocation or a purposeful life, each interviewee was able to identify particular elements of a meaningful life such as having a good job or maintaining healthy relationships.

The three Christian study participants offered fairly traditional Christian understandings of vocation. For example, when I asked Allen during our interview to define vocation, he answered:

I really go back to the etymology and I really do see it as a calling from God. ... God drawing out all the gifts and passions and abilities that He's given to me um to use those for um some kind of good purpose in the world. Um, and as a Christian, I think all those things benefit the church and then they kind of spill over into the world as well. ... And it's more than just career. It's, ah, it's kind of the whole ... direction which my life bends.

During our interview, Stephanie offered a definition of vocation that aligns quite well with Fowler's comprehensive definition of vocation. In response to my question to share what vocation means to her, Stephanie said:

I think I see vocation as more than like a career, more than something that will bring me a lot of money. ... I see vocation as like a calling you know. Like I think more than ever I realize that I can't just do a 9 to 5 job and ... be okay with that. Like I want everything that I do to be directly tied into God's plan for my life. ... (M)y vocation is my calling. And I don't think that God calls us all to be, you know, pastors or evangelists. ... (M)y pastor always says some people are called to be Christian lawyers, Christian doctors, Christian actors, whatever. But I think that God gives us all talents and passions and that He does, He does, have a specific plan ... for each and everyone one of us. And so, I believe that my vocation will be what God has called me to do and to be.

Stephanie's notion of God's call on her life extends to her personal relationships and her daily volunteer and church commitments.

Elizabeth, the graduate student at seminary, shared during her interview that while interning at a church as part of the fellowship, she often talked about vocation with her site supervisor. She described vocation as a kind of self-actualizing or as "embracing

from a Christian perspective what you're called to be, who God created you to be." She notes that there is an internal quality to vocation and that it is not tied to one's profession. Rather, it means using the strengths and gifts God has given you and learning how trust in those gifts so that you can best discern your vocation. Further, a meaningful life or a life lived in vocation requires intentionality and discernment. Another element of the meaningful life is intimate and genuine relationships.

Most study participants who identified themselves as spiritual but not necessarily religious were able to articulate how they understand what it means to live a purposeful life and how the fellowship helped them develop this awareness. For instance, Rachel praised the fellowship for how it helps students like herself who do not fit into a traditional religious box contemplate how to live a meaningful life. Through the fellowship, Rachel learned that she wants to do things of intellectual value but that it is equally important that she does things that she enjoys. For example, Rachel is currently an assistant Lacrosse coach at the college and while she does not get paid, she values the experience because it provides her the opportunity to mentor young women. Other key elements to a meaningful life for Rachel include having a community of people who share her values and who will also challenge her and regularly engagement in spiritual practice.

Kimberly also described how the Fellowship helped students like herself who are not religious to discern how to live a life of purpose. During our interview, Kimberly talked about how the Fellowship equipped her with tools to engage in conversations about the life's big questions such as "What does a meaning life look life for you?" Kimberly defined vocation in terms of a person's job or how one occupies one's time in a

structured way. For people who do not need to work, this could include charity or service work.

Kimberly also discussed what gives her life meaning. The first element is having a meaningful vocation, paid or unpaid. She noted that if she did not need to work for a salary, she would feel compelled to volunteer a nonprofit or service organization like her fellowship work site. A second critical piece is social relationships including her family, life partner and friends. Thirdly, Kimberly noted that living a meaningful life involves continually reflecting upon one's place in the world and one's responsibilities to others.

Sophia described how the fellowship helped and continues to help her see that one's vocation is not just one's occupation. She noted that a meaningful life involves working hard for something one cares about. It is about identifying one's passions by stepping out of one's comfort zone to challenge oneself. This life involves identifying a career that is personally rewarding but not necessarily a high status position in our society. Sophia also observed that a meaningful life includes a commitment to lifelong learning.

Likewise, Julia described a meaningful life as more than one's career. It involves all of one's relationships, volunteer work and hobbies, and requires one to consider how one is affecting the world in one's day to day life. Julia recently began a new career as a software engineer and while she enjoys her job, she is still trying to figure out how to make software engineering more meaningful to herself and society. One way she is living out this commitment is by mentoring other women who are interested in this career. She notes that there are few women in senior leadership positions in the software engineering field. Finally, Julia also identifies engaging in regular discernment as critical

to identifying how to live a life of purpose.

Ricardo also talked about how the fellowship helped him identify what gives his life meaning beyond simply having a good career. First, working at Public Counsel helped him discern that working with the Latino community is a critical aspect of a meaningful life for him personally. Secondly, Ricardo described how the fellowship challenged him to reflect upon the role of family in his life. He now sees that being in relationship with his family is an important part of living a meaningful life. Ricardo noted that while he was at college, he always talked about how important his family was to him. However, as he engaged in the weekly contemplative practices and participated in the seminar's values clarification exercises, Ricardo realized he was not truly living out his commitment to his family. In fact, he would often return home while still in school without even telling his parents he was in town. Now, as a young research fellow in Washington, D.C., Ricardo calls his Mom and Dad at least once a week or sometimes more and he describes his relationship with his family is much stronger.

Kylie offered a fairly straightforward understanding of what a meaningful life looks like. In our interview, she suggested that basically, a meaningful life involves treating everyone with respect. A second important component is maintaining a healthy balance between work and non-work and spending time with people one cares about. She noted that the people she meets in her professional life who do not have this balance are so unhappy. She added:

I mean you could still have purpose I think but like if you did not have balance there would be nothing that would ground you and then I could imagine that one would work and either burn out or become insane. I mean people laugh about it but like, yeah, a lot of substance abuse comes from not having balance and not, you know, knowing yourself to know what's too much, what's not too much.

During her interview, Melissa described a purposeful life involves: a meaningful career; spending time with family and friends; traveling; lifelong learning; maintaining a healthy balance between activity and intentional reflection; and, having a supportive group of colleagues with whom she can discuss the joys and challenges of engaging in social justice work.

Samantha was one of the interviewees who had a hard time offering a formal or coherent definition of a meaningful life. At one point in our interview she said “I don’t know Susan, I have not really figured that out yet.” While we both laughed, she went on to say something very important:

I also think that if I did know maybe that wouldn’t be so good ‘cause I don’t think you ever really actually know. Um but, I ... think taking the time to think about what makes you feel like you’re doing something meaningful was what I got ... from that seminar. ... (N)ot only the importance of doing that, but how I can do that, like what are some exercises that I can do to help me think about that question because it’s so broad that it’s like you sometimes just feel like there’s no way to even approach it.

Impact on Intellectual Growth

The HERI study on college students and spirituality indicates that regular engagement in particular spiritual practices such as meditation can support overall student academic achievement. On the pre-interview questionnaire, I asked the study participants to identify what impact the fellowship had on their intellectual growth. Thirteen of the fourteen fellows were able to identify ways in which the program facilitated their intellectual growth.

Several described how the fellowship helped them integrate their intellectual understandings with their religious, spiritual and ethical worldviews.

For example, Allen wrote on his questionnaire that

(t)he service component and discussions about spirituality confirmed the ethical dimension of my intellectual growth---I thought more seriously about the need to integrate academic learning and theory with practice; knowledge-accumulation has to have a moral, relational outworking in my life for me to live with purpose and conviction.

During our interview, Allen and I talked about this in more detail as he described several challenges he faced as a English and Comparative Literary Studies major. He observed that literary theory raised questions for him about epistemology and how people interpret not just texts but the world itself. He noted that contemporary literary theorists reject the existence of metanarratives and argue “(t)here’s no truth that extends over time. There’s just kind of text and context and situation and um there are no absolutes, really.” And, if there is no absolute truth, then we need to grope for some kind of ethical framework to ground our lives.

Sophia described the fellowship as pivotal to her intellectual growth because it helped her learn how to better articulate her personal values. She noted the following on the pre-interview survey:

I would describe the program as playing a binding role in my intellectual growth. While I had several experiences to build a foundation for my values, I found that I was often confused about how to articulate them. The Spirituality and Social Justice Seminar provided a space for me to learn how to cohere my thoughts, and bind my experiences together into personal meaning. This jump in my intellectual growth was astounding, and has proved to continually pay off since my completion of the seminar.

Samantha, a Critical Theory and Social Justice Major, described how the fellowship helped her see how her academic work translated into practice and described the critical role regular engagement in spiritual practices played on her overall wellness.

Samantha noted the following on her survey:

Values and Vocations [Fellowship] kept me sane. As a senior, I piled a lot onto my plate. Having a set time once a week to reflect on how I was spending my time, what I enjoyed/didn't enjoy about my life, and to hear how other students spent their time was incredibly therapeutic. Values and Vocations helped me see how my academic work translated into my work site which was a new intellectual challenge that campus life could not give.

Elizabeth explained how the fellowship helped her to reconcile her intellectual life with her spiritual and personal beliefs. She wrote on her interview survey that the fellowship

brought the critical thinking skills I had learned in class into a more personal space. It further pushed me to reconcile my intellectual abilities with my spiritual and personal beliefs. It brought more humility to my intellectual growth as I saw things from a bigger perspective when I looked on it from a spiritual or social justice perspective.

In our interview, Elizabeth shared that she was raised by very intellectual parents but that she attended a conservative, fundamentalist Christian church. As a young adult, she struggled with the tension between what she learned at school and with what her church told her about evolution and other scientific theory. Participating in the weekly seminar helped her reconcile her intellectual reason and her Christian faith because she was exposed to other people of faith who accepted modern science and reason. She concluded: "I think more than anything else actually was being exposed to people who were okay with me like just thinking it through and being okay with me doubting because I could get there eventually ... I just needed that space."

Other interviewees described how the weekly seminar helped them become more open-minded by exposing them to people with diverse backgrounds. Stephanie noted on her questionnaire that the program stimulated her intellectual growth "by exposing me to

new ideas/perspectives/practices as well as by forcing me to better articulate my core beliefs and the reasoning behind them (during group discussions, for instance).” Melissa wrote that the fellowship “exposed me to a variety of religious and nonreligious thinkers and their philosophies. It encouraged me to ponder, explore, and analyze—and to accept that sometimes I will not find an answer.” Likewise, Nancy noted that “(t)he program supported my intellectual growth in that it helped me develop my thoughts on vocation and purpose. It also helped me discuss difficult questions with people of numerous religious and political backgrounds.”

Impact on Religious, Spiritual and Ethical Growth

Thirteen of the fourteen fellows identified tangible, meaningful ways in which the fellowship nurtured their religious, spiritual and ethical growth. Several fellows described how their experiences affirmed and enriched their spirituality. For example, Yvonne wrote on her survey that the fellowship confirmed “what my mom told me as a child [which is] that religious/spiritual practices allow one to stay connected to your inner soul in order to live a life that is your own and connects you with a deeper power and connection to the interconnected lives that we all share on this earth.” Further, when one is at peace with oneself, “then we can be able to love, respect and work with others to always create positive change.”

Stephanie noted that

(t)he program taught me how to go deeper with God through practices such as meditation, mindfulness, and extended prayer. I was able to connect with God on a more intimate level and focus on hearing from Him rather than becoming distracted by all my preoccupations and anxieties about school. Through group discussion, I was able to better articulate my beliefs, and I became more vocal/confident about my religious tradition and why I believe what I believe.

Rachel described how the fellowship helped her to “integrate a lot of experiences and practices that I had participated in in the past.” She also appreciated learning new practices and felt that this helped her to see similarities across religions. The fellowship also helped her become more comfortable talking about spirituality with her peers.

Likewise, Alexandra noted that the fellowship

created a container for me to continue developing these [spiritual] aspects of myself with others. Also, the seminar introduced me to new spiritual and personal reflection practices that helped me to integrate the work I was doing into a sustainable experience. And it facilitated the sense of responsibility I felt to contribute to the community around me.

Other former fellows talked about how the fellowship broadened their understanding of spirituality and helped them to appreciate that they are spiritual beings. During our interview, Kimberly noted that she does not affiliate with any given religion and rarely discusses religion except through a political lens. She went on to say “(w)hat I really liked about Values and Vocations is that it ... broadened my sense of what spirituality ... means.” Continuing, she noted that “I still like don’t contemplate spirituality or those issues through any lens of a doctrine.” But she values engaging contemplative practices such as walking meditation because they help her to reflect upon her values and personal happiness.

Kimberly now defines spirituality as “the process of being thoughtful about your emotions and actions and like thinking through like how to be ... how to be like emotionally healthy and happy.” Thus, for Kimberly, spiritual practices such as journaling or walking meditation give her space to clarify her thoughts, feelings and actions.

Samantha also discussed how the fellowship helped her refine her understanding

of spirituality. She wrote on her interview survey the following observations:

It is easy to fill your time with things that you *should* be doing, Values and Vocations helped me fill my time with things I found meaningful. The practices and exercises we engaged with helped me not only identify what is meaningful to me, but they also gave me the tools to prioritize the meaningful things in my life. To me, filling my life with meaning is spirituality, and the program helped me achieve a spiritual life.

For Samantha, a life of meaning involves intentionally thinking about her presence in the world, how she relates to other people and doing something with purpose.

Similarly, Sophia explained in her survey how the program equipped her to engage in spiritual reflection. She noted that

(t)he program gave me the tools to think about my spirituality and personal values in a way that is more effective. It gave me solid feet on the ground, from which I am more equipped to develop my personal identity. While I may not know the answers to many questions, even my own, I feel that I am a stronger, more well-rounded person spiritually because of the seminar.

Others described how the program helped them discern the relationship between spirituality and vocation and fostered a sense of personal empowerment. For example, Kylie observed in her survey that

(t)he program completely transformed my religious, spiritual and ethical development. Not only did it only it strengthen my vocational desires, but the spiritual practices gave me the tools to empower and sustain these goals. I think more than anything it expanded my awareness of spiritual practices and empowered me to fully understand how spiritual practices can transform lives; by opening the door to many options, the program helped me understand how MY life can be transformed, how I have the power to transform my life and how these experiences can bring so much joy and fulfillment to my life.

Julia wrote that the fellowship “helped me to connect the idea of vocation with the idea of spirituality. Most importantly it reminds me that in planning my vocation it is important to ask questions such as how my own spirituality is going to grow, and how I am going to connect with the rest of the world in a meaningful way.”

The one former fellow who had difficulty with this question was Ricardo. On his survey, Ricardo said that he was “not entirely sure what type of role the program played in my religious, spiritual, and ethical development.” While Ricardo had difficulty answering this question, I believe that the program did foster his ethical growth. In particular, the fellowship helped Ricardo identify his core values and how he can live with intention to these values. For instance, Ricardo noted on his survey that “(t)he program really helped me identify the three most important values in my life: equity, equality, and honesty. These are values that will always guide me and will be vital in my career as an advocate for the Latino community.” And, during our interview, Ricardo spoke about how the fellowship helped him see how he could more faithfully live out his commitment to his family.

Impact on Career Discernment

Thirteen of the fourteen former fellows were able to describe how the fellowship helped with their career discernment processes. Several interviewees focused on how the fellowship taught them to seek careers in which they could live out their deeply held values and commitments. Stephanie noted on her questionnaire that the fellowship

taught me to be mindful/aware of the values that define me and that thus are important to me in a future career. Through reflection, meditation, and my experiences at my worksite, I learned what kind of environment I thrive in, what type of work I find most fulfilling, and how critical it is to my sense of well-being that my job/career be aligned with my personal values and ideals.

Similarly, in our interview, Kimberly noted that through the fellowship, she was able to articulate why she enjoyed working at her fellowship work site and to identify her “nonnegotiables in terms of work.” On her survey, Kimberly noted that these nonnegotiables include a career in social justice that would feel meaningful spiritually.

Likewise, Yvonne spent a lot of time in her interview talking about how the fellowship helped her learn that her work should be something she cares deeply about and that will allow her to grow personally.

Sophia observed that the program helped her understand the role she would like her career to play in her life. On her survey, Sophia wrote

While I do not feel that the seminar led me to a different career path than I had previously planned, I do feel that it helped me define how I would like to relate to my work. The seminar taught me that no matter what I am doing in my life, I can be connected to the community around me. I would like to work, on the ground, for a more equal and just society. I can do that in a variety of ways, and I plan to incorporate a lifetime of service into my plans.

Other interviewees described how the fellowship helped them identify their personal strengths and the types of careers that would enable them to use these strengths in personally fulfilling ways. Rachel noted that the program helped her

think about not just where I wanted to work, but about my strengths and how I would most be able to contribute to that work. For example, at my worksite I felt uninspired and unalive by the actual work I was doing, even though I loved the organization. It definitely has played a part in thinking about where I want to work, how I want to do that work, and how I will be able to take care of myself at a job.

Similarly, Kylie explained on her survey that the program

was tremendously helpful for me to understand my strengths and what would make me feel fulfilled. I believe I knew I wanted to work with vulnerable populations (teaching or organizing/leadership development or service-oriented), but I did not have a sense of where my strengths lied. Not only did it help me understand what it would take to happily/sanely pursue a high-impact job working with a vulnerable population, but also the immense payoff and direct effect I could have. The program also showed me how important these convictions were to me and the importance of spirituality.

Other former fellows described how the fellowship helped them identify particular career paths or helped prepare them for these paths. Allen described how the

fellowship helped him in his ongoing process of discerning whether to pursue ordained ministry or to become a New Testament scholar. He wrote on his survey that

I was torn between academia and ministry when I entered the program. I realized by the end that, although I will always be a learner and a researcher at heart, the things I learn must be translated into relational living. Scholarship feeds my imagination and furthers my development as a person, but ministry consummates that growth. I need to stay attached to both in some form or another.

Elizabeth described how important the fellowship was to her vocational discernment and overall well-being. Elizabeth worked with young adults at a Christian church in the neighborhood. During her internship, she developed a close relationship with her site supervisor, a pastor, who taught her how to connect with people, to focus on self-care and the importance of having community. He helped Elizabeth unmask unhealthy behavioral patterns including her struggle with perfectionism, supported her as she applied for graduate school and helped her to discern that she should take time off between college and graduate school “so that I could take some time to ‘soul search’ and get more in touch with the other areas of my life outside of academic performance.” While Elizabeth struggled during the first part of her year off, she was also forced to confront hard questions such as “Who am I? How do I you know judge myself?” She used the year to focus on identifying her true passions and learning how to establish appropriate boundaries to maintain her spiritual and mental health.

The fellowship also helped Elizabeth see how to incorporate a social justice focus into her work as a clinical psychologist. She wrote

had I not done the program, I probably would not be aware of the ways I could incorporate social justice into my profession. Now, I want to join research labs that look at overlooked populations (like special needs kids), and be mentored under professors who actively participate in social justice outside their academic life.

Julia described how her internship tutoring children and teaching a creative writing course prepared her for her teaching career. While Julia is no longer teaching, she believes that “the lessons I learned through Values and Vocations still drive the way I think about my career, and what I would like to do within my new field to make sure I am still doing something meaningful with my life.”

The Three Program Elements

I asked all of the participants if they could identify one aspect of the fellowship as more important than the others. I divided the program into three elements for this question: (1) the work site experience; (2) the weekly seminar exercises and conversations; and, (3) engaging the spiritual practices. While some former fellows spoke more in-depth about one element of the program than others, thirteen of the fourteen study participants believed that all three elements were important. Many of them saw the three elements as interdependent and described how they worked together to provide a holistic learning experience.

Kylie observed that each element was critical to her growth and that while she was in the program, she felt like the three components flowed together smoothly. She said in her interview that “I can’t imagine that I would sign up to do [or] to learn about the contemplative practices and to sit around and talk if I didn’t have some type of work experience that would be pushing me to do it.” She went on to say

I don’t think I would have gotten as much out of the practices if we hadn’t been discussing them afterwards. And I don’t think I would have gotten as much out of my work if I hadn’t been doing the contemplative practices. Um, and I don’t think that I would have been able to process and grow as much if I hadn’t had the conversations. I think that that they are all so interdependent.

She added that doing the practices first deepened the quality of the weekly seminar conversations.

Sophia shared similar observations during our interview, saying, “I think that they are all very important to do in conjunction with one another and I can definitively understand how they’re inter-related. I would not have wanted to just go work at the nonprofit and not have any space or opportunity to reflect upon it.” Likewise, Julia noted in our interview that the weekly seminar enriched her work experience and distinguished it from other types of volunteer work she did while on campus. She added, “what I thought was kind of unique like about Values and Vocations was like kind of connecting your volunteer work to your spirituality.”

Rachel, the young woman who spent a year at a spiritual intentional community in New England before transferring to the college, favorably compared her experience in the fellowship with her time with this community. Rachel thought that the way the program balanced community work with critical conversation and spiritual practice made it both distinctive and meaningful. During our interview, Rachel said “I could have just volunteer[ed] or done a class. It think it was the practices that we did and the conversations were very important. Like I would not have had the same experience if I just did the work site.”

The one former fellow who did not specifically identify the three components as important was Allen. He noted that it was hard for him to see the connection between our weekly seminar conversations and the work he was doing as a tutor at a local community center. It is worth noting that Allen and Melissa were the only two fellows who participated in the program for just the spring 2012 semester. While Melissa said all

three pieces of the program were important, she could not articulate why she felt that way. She also said that sometimes it was hard to connect our seminar conversations to her work site experiences. It is highly likely that Allen and Melissa both felt this way due to the way I facilitated the seminar that semester.

(1) The Weekly Seminar

Every participant interviewed for this study spoke about how important the weekly seminar was to their spiritual growth and vocational discernment. I asked the participants to identify specific activities or exercises that we engaged in the seminar that were particularly rewarding. The interviewees consistently identified the seminar conversations as the most rewarding. In particular, they mentioned our conversations about the relationship between social justice and spirituality, discussions about how to work in minority communities as a person of privilege, and our reflections how to maintain appropriate boundaries and take care of oneself while engaged in social justice work. The StrengthsFinder and values clarifications exercises were also important. Table 5:1 lists the exercises participants identified as particularly helpful on their pre-interview questionnaire. Participants were not limited to naming one particular exercise.

Table 5:1. Helpful Seminar Exercises as Identified by Study Participants

Exercise	Number of Study Participants
Small group conversations	11
StrengthsFinder	6
Values Clarification Exercises	3
Readings	3
Journaling	2

Small Group Conversations: Comments on the pre-interview surveys and insights offered during the personal interviews suggest that all of the study participants found the

weekly conversations to be rewarding, challenging, inspiring and important to their well-being. Both Samantha and Alexandra used the word therapeutic to describe the seminar. Alexandra also described how the weekly seminar provided a “container” for people to come together around spiritual inquiry and hold each other accountable for engaging spiritual practices and conversations. She observed that the weekly meeting sometimes felt like a much needed support group where she could intentionally talk about her spirituality.

Stephanie also talked about the weekly seminar fostered her mental and spiritual health. During her interview, she described looking forward each week to the seminar so that she could pray, contemplate and talk with people from different religious backgrounds. In particular, she appreciated the candles, snacks and welcoming environment. She recalled during our interview how she used the contemplative time to do a mindful walking meditation outside and said she remembered that “I would just like to walk outside and like look at the stars ... ‘cause I feel like that was also ... the time I used to just connect with God too.”

Kylie’s seminar group was comprised of four female students and myself. She worked with homeless and low-income residents in Skid Row. This was an extremely rewarding but challenging experience because while she was working there, the Los Angeles Police Department was routinely arresting and relocating her clients. Kylie observed that the weekly seminar was incredibly important because of the tight communal bonds that developed over the semester.

Kylie wrote on her questionnaire that:

the role of community in the fellowship was extremely important—the small group conversations were extremely influential to my spiritual development. By having a space to share worksite challenges, especially one that was so supportive in a spiritual sense, was so valuable for me. I felt completely comfortable sharing deep challenges and loved being able to provide comfort and advice to others. Our discussions of social justice and vocation strengthened my convictions about pursuing a job to empower and serve others. I oftentimes think back to our discussions on the importance of balance and health; with my current job I am so grateful to have the understanding that balance is essential to pursue a high-stress career with vulnerable populations.

Likewise, Ricardo described how important the weekly meeting to his overall well-being. Ricardo's seminar was held on Friday evenings. During our interview, he talked about how meeting every Friday was a perfect end to a stressful week and that while he tried to talk with his roommates about some of the emotional challenges he experienced at his work site, he found the seminar community to be much more supportive. The weekly contemplative practices created space for him to engage in serious introspection that helped him maintain his mental and spiritual well-being.

Samantha highlighted the importance of the weekly conversations on her pre-interview survey writing that these conversations were the most rewarding aspect of the program for her. Specifically, she noted:

The opportunity to hear how others define and understand social justice and spirituality helped me grasp how I see those things as well. I loved hearing other participants talk about a powerful moment for them; for example, [a current student], who worked with incarcerated juveniles, hosted an open mic about the prison system. It was a huge success, and at our weekly seminar she was glowing talking about the event and how alive it made her feel. [This student] found a way to engage in a social justice issue that was powerful and meaningful to her, and getting to hear about her experience was very valuable. Entering the seminar, my beliefs were pretty stagnant; after Values and Vocations, my beliefs are much more dynamic. The exercises and practices we engaged in helped give me traction to think about topics that are so vast, and at times, overwhelming.

Several former fellows talked about how the conversations could be challenging. During our interview, Elizabeth talked about a specific conversation we had one night about a documentary about people committing suicide by jumping off the Gold Gate Bridge. One young woman in the group talked about the courage she thought was required for someone to jump off the bridge. This was difficult for Elizabeth to hear because she had a friend who committed suicide by jumping off the bridge. Elizabeth did not speak up at the time but now wishes that she had because she “knew that this person’s experience wasn’t ... like that at all.” She went on to say that her peer’s “worldview and experience was just so different” from hers and that “in retrospect it would have been nice had I probably just said something” but it was too hard. At the same time, Elizabeth did in general enjoy the seminar. She wrote on her survey that

It was rewarding because I realized we all had very similar desires for bringing good to the world and for wanting to maintain a healthy lifestyle. It was challenging because we all came from different backgrounds and it was sometimes difficult to connect. Overall, I was inspired by the group’s passion for bringing peace and justice to the world and became more convinced that diversity is beautiful and something that we should strive for in our various communities.

Clifton StrengthsFinder Assessment: The participants also talked about how important the StrengthsFinder exercises were to their growth. Yvonne described herself as being a rather shy teenager and young adult. She never really thought that she had any particular strengths until this assessment showed her that being about to listen to others is in fact a strength. She noted that being able to listen enables her to facilitate conversations and provide guidance to others which is what she is currently doing in her job as a reproductive health specialist. She added that the values clarifications work complimented the StrengthsFinder work. Knowing her values and strengths has made

her a much more confident young professional.

Elizabeth also talked about the importance of StrengthsFinder. She described discovering out her strengths was like “holding like treasure. It was kind of cool like seeing little bits of myself that were special and unique.” She discovered that her strengths matched with her career goals and dream of becoming a clinical psychologist. Similarly, Ricardo noted on his survey that

I really liked the StrengthsQuest exercise. I thought it was great that we should focus [on] developing our strengths rather than trying to work on our weaknesses. I have tried to live by this principle and consciously place myself in situations where I can further develop these skills.

(2) The Contemplative Practices

Each of the study participants discussed how important learning the contemplative practices was for their personal growth. Some of the young adults described how the practices helped them reflect on personal and spiritual questions. For instance, Sophia participated in the fellowship after a community service trip to post-Katrina New Orleans where she confronted systemic racism and the reality of her privilege as a White person for the first time. Engaging the weekly spiritual practices gave her time, space and a forum for considering difficult questions about race and privilege. She noted on her survey how many of the practices helped her by “not only bringing attention to myself, but also the world, and my place within it. With each of these exercises, I found a safe space to ask myself essential questions and reflect upon my feelings about the issues at hand.”

Ricardo described how engaging in the practices helped him to reflect upon challenging experiences at his work site and reminded him of his connection to his own

community. During our interview, Ricardo talked a lot about his work at Public Counsel. This was the first time that he worked with clients or individual community members. He realized through the seminar reflections that he was experiencing “vicarious trauma” or experiencing the pain of the young people with whom he worked. He remembers meeting troubled Chicano young adults about his same age and thinking

I could have easily been in the same position. Being denied you know the right to a public education and being kicked out of school because they have tattoos and an ankle monitor from being on probation you know. It was very difficult. And you know it brought back memories of my uncle, cousins, and even my father who had been in and out of jail.

While it was a difficult time for Ricardo, he noted that “it was important for me to recognize ... my connection to the community” and that rather than ignoring his feelings, he could reflect upon them through the practices.

During her interview, Nancy explained how engaging in the different spiritual practices on a regular basis had a profound impact on her sense of self. Specifically, she described how engaging these practices helped her see that she “deserved” to take care of herself. Nepali culture emphasizes selflessness to the point that she sometimes did not think she could take time to take care of herself. Through the fellowship, she learned about her own worthiness and came to value the practices as a way of taking care of her spiritual, mental and physical health.

Other study participants talked about how regularly engaging in spiritual practices helped them learn the importance of simply pausing to breathe deeply and re-center oneself. For example, Yvonne described the spiritual practices as incredibly important to her mental health.

Yvonne wrote on her questionnaire that

(h)aving the opportunity to reflect and learn practices that maintain your value system so that you do not “burn out” from work allows you to know that you can live a meaningful life if you have reflective tools to be able to understand your personal needs and values to live a life that reflects growth, happiness and connection to something bigger than oneself.

Samantha noted that prior to the fellowship she was not doing anything to take care of herself spiritually but thanks to the fellowship, she now sees how important it is to take time for oneself. During the interview, Samantha observed that she continues to “make more of an effort to just set aside time for me to think about my just me relationship with everything. I don’t even really know how to articulate it but just my presence in the world.”

One of the questions on the pre-interview survey asked participants to identify spiritual practices they found helpful. Participants were able to select more than one practice. The labyrinth, deep listening and meditation were most frequently identified as important. Table 5.2 lists the practices the participants found particularly helpful.

Table 5.2. Helpful Contemplative Practices as Identified By Study Participants

Contemplative Practice	Number of Study Participants
Labyrinth	9
Deep Listening	6
Meditation	6
Prayer of Examen	5
Walking meditation	5
Rule of Life	4
Mindfulness	4
Yoga	4
Mantras	2
Mandalas	2
<i>Lectio Divina</i>	2
Prayers for the World	1
Praying the Questions	1

Kylie described how learning different spiritual practices in a supportive

community sparked tremendous personal spiritual growth.

She observed on her survey the following:

I found all these practices very helpful. More than anything, I felt very empowered and encouraged by doing them in a group—my exposure to the practices would not have been as transformative without the community. Some of them I had previously learned, but I particularly found meaning and sustaining value in the mantras and developing a rule of life. I believe both practices allowed me [to] put aside my confusion and turmoil of my feelings about Christianity and family, and allowed me the freedom to understand/experience how I could take my own spirituality into my own hands. I think I truly connected with the labyrinth as a result of my background—Episcopalian services are very ritual, following the same pattern every week (including when to stand/sit/sing/etc), and the labyrinth literally gives you the path to walk but similar to [T]aizé services, gives flexibility about the practice to allow for a more spiritual and less doctrinal/dry religious experience.

The labyrinth was a particularly meaningful spiritual resources for many fellows.

Rachel described how the labyrinth provided a mix of silence, movement and mindfulness in a way that fed her spirit. Julia observed that “(t)here was something very beautiful about everyone walking together in silence.” Yvonne also talked about the labyrinth during our interview and said that now, as a young professional living in the Bay Area, she is looking for labyrinths that she could use. (During the interview, I told Yvonne about the labyrinth at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco and one week after our interview, she emailed me to tell me that she had walked it and plans to do so again.)

When I asked Yvonne what she liked so much about labyrinths, she responded:

I think just um pacing yourself and also um being quiet and trying to ... think about what's important like the questions that you have for yourself that you can deal with right now, that you're trying to think about. And also just like channeling energy in that quiet space as you walk and just [thinking about] ... what do I need to calm down in my life to make me happy? Um, is it spending time by myself? Is it actually just staying on top of my work and reading more, um seeing music or being active? So it allows you ... to just walk in a space that you know that eventually will end but in this time this is what you have to focus on. Try to get everything else out of your head.

Melissa also talked about the power of the labyrinth in her interview. She noted that she is a fairly anxious person who always like to plan ahead and that she has a hard time slowing down. When she first learned the practices in the fellowship, she found it difficult to quiet down. For some reason, the labyrinth helped her to slow down in a way other practices did not. She observed that

a lot of times I felt like when I was first doing them [the practices] in the fellowship it was really hard for me to quiet down. ... I remember when we walked the labyrinth the first time. I was like, by the end, I finally like really wasn't thinking about anything and I was super excited about that because I'd never thought that that was possible and I really liked that.

Several recently graduated fellows described the rule of life as being particularly important during their time of transition from college into the "real" world. For example, Samantha wrote on her survey:

It is easy to get caught up in the bothersome minutia or little stressors of our quotidian activities, and often the things that give us meaning or purpose in life fall to the back burner. Our group participated in this activity [writing a rule of life] in the last weeks of V&V, right when I was gearing up for graduation. It was so important for me to go through the transition of college into "real" life with my rules of life written down. I have them posted on my wall so I see them everyday.

Allen and I spoke about the importance of the rule of life to him about two months after he graduated from college. During our interview, Allen talked about how difficult times of transition can be saying:

without context and without community ... and all these things I kind of used to um piece my identity together, it's easy to kind of forget my priorities, not my values as much, but just um the things that have been helpful in the past, things that have kept me spiritually or emotionally or socially grounded in the past. Um so to actually have ... the rule of life has ... been a good reminder from time to time when I need to look that up again and remember what exactly I was doing before and why I decided these things should be consistent in my life.

As a follow up question, I asked Allen how useful he thought the rule would be over the

long term. Allen was very confident that the rule would continue to play some sort of role in his prayer life saying:

every so often I realize that um God is trying to teach me a particular lesson or a set of lessons and usually it's helpful for me to write those down. Um, it's just ... certain themes that keep recurring or things that wise people in my life say to me or things that might come up in Scripture. ... I think I already have taken to writing those down as of the last few years. I keep a little notebook where I kind of jot recurring thoughts or prayers ... [and] I think those can kind of evolve into a rule of life.

Deep listening, mindfulness and walking meditation were important for a number of former fellows. For instance, Samantha loved deep listening because it made her “more conscious of how much I talk, why I choose to talk and how much space my voices takes up when I speak.” Ricardo finds it difficult to enjoy the present and noted that “I am always planning for the future or thinking about the past. It is very hard for me to get out of this mindset. I really appreciate that mindfulness and walking meditation because it helps me concentrate on the present and my surroundings.”

Stephanie both wrote and discussed during our interview the importance of mindfulness and walking meditation to her. She wrote:

As a college student at the time, I found myself rushing through my day and simply going through the motions ... instead of really being mindful of my environment, my actions, my thoughts, and my feelings. It was such a refreshing experience to be deliberative and pay close attention to details as small as my breathing. It gave me a chance to become more self-aware and more aware of my surroundings.

At the time of our interview, Stephanie re-iterated that she continues to find it hard to slow down and mindfully walk through her day. At the same time, she described how she tries to be mindful of what she does and how she treats other people.

(3) Work Site Experiences

The participants in this study worked in a variety of work sites. All of the interviewees loved their work sites and thirteen out of fourteen described their work as challenging and rewarding. And even Rachel, the one person who did not find her work particularly inspiring, expressed admiration for the mission of the organization for which she worked and identified her former supervisor as an important mentor.

Several former fellows described how important their work site experiences were to their vocational discernment. As noted above, Elizabeth's work experience at a local church helped her grow in many ways and affirmed her sense of call into clinical psychology. Likewise, Kimberly learned through her work site experience that she needs to have a job that involves social justice work and that keeps her spiritually alive. Ricardo learned through his work site experiences that he would like to have a job that involves both research or policy analysis and direct service with community members or clients.

Melissa also described how her work experience helped her clarify her sense of vocation. She would like to eventually pursue a PhD so that she can become a professor at a small liberal arts college. Melissa participated in the summer program and during the last semester of her senior year. Both times her fellowship site was Planned Parenthood. Melissa loved working at Planned Parenthood because of her passion for reproductive health. She was also able to attend a national Planned Parenthood conference during her summer fellowship experience.

At the same time, Melissa learned that she does not like phone banking or recruiting volunteers to participate in phone banking. She also learned that while she

values reproductive health issues, she does not enjoy working directly with clients because it is hard for her to put emotional distance between herself and her clients. During the values clarification exercises, Melissa discovered that her top values are authenticity and education. She now believes that the way she can most authentically live out her commitment to education, reproductive health, social justice and public policy is by becoming a faculty person who will educate and empower future social justice activists.

Ten of the interviewees either named specific individuals in their work sites as important mentors or described how their work colleagues and the other volunteers inspired them in some way. Several described how their work site supervisors taught them about how to maintain a healthy balance between their careers and other aspects of their life and helped nurture their creativity.

Allen tutored a neighborhood outreach center in Eagle Rock that had recently opened up a community coffee house. Allen described learning a lot from two men at with the center. The first man is the founder of the community center who is a devout Christian. Allen was impressed with this man's thoughtfulness and intentionality. Allen noted that the founder "always talked about the need to practice 'faithfulness' in every endeavor" and shared stories with Allen about his walk with God. Allen was inspired by his integrity, perseverance and faith. The second mentor is a pastor who manages the coffee house. Allen noted that this manager models "the value of joyful service and concern for others."

He observed that he

never saw him not smiling and he would stop to exchange greetings and conversation with every person who walked through the door. Even though he was unemployed at the time I worked with him (his ministry position was unpaid), he seemed to be completely focused on the needs of everyone around him. I remember thinking every time I talked to him that he must be a wonderful father to his children.

Finally, several fellows described how important it was for them to receive the stipend for their work. In fact, Ricardo would not have been able to participate without a stipend. Samantha and Kimberly also discussed how important it was to receive some compensation as they engaged in community work.

Reflections

Through this practical theological research project, I sought to examine how college chaplains, interfaith directors and other higher education professionals can support undergraduate students as they develop their personal systems of meaning, engage in vocational discernment and consider how to live a purposeful life. Using insights from one particular fellowship program, I explored how experiential learning, critical dialogue and regular engagement in spiritual practice supports young adults in these efforts. The results of this study are very positive. A number of the study participants continue to reflect upon their experiences in the fellowship, engage in some of the practices they learned during the seminar and continue to express a passion for social justice work. In the following section, I highlight particular insights gleaned from this research project.

First, the young adults in this research study talked about religion and spirituality in ways that are compatible with the research findings of the recent HERI study on

college student spirituality. Three of the fourteen students strongly identified as Christian, one young woman identified as Buddhist and several talked about the influence their exposure to Christianity, and in particular Catholicism, as children had on them today. However, the majority of the study participants, including the former Catholic young adults, felt more comfortable expressing an interest in spirituality rather than identifying with a particular religion.

In addition, all fourteen young adults expressed interest in developing a meaningful life philosophy and a desire to be part of a movement to transform society as an expression of their spirituality. Further, most of the study participants were able to see how talking about spirituality and engaging in regular spiritual practice enhanced their intellectual growth and their spiritual and mental well-being.

Secondly, this study confirms the validity of Parks' thesis that colleges should become mentoring communities and the critical role specific mentors can play in the faith development of young adults. All of the study participants talked about how important the weekly seminar meetings were to their emotional, spiritual and mental well-being. Meeting once a week to pause, engage in spiritual introspection, and to talk with peers in a supportive environment was both therapeutic and life affirming. The young adults also described how their peers encouraged them to critically reflect upon their political, cultural, religious and spiritual beliefs and helped them learn how to articulate these beliefs in clear, articulate and meaningful ways. In many ways, the seminar participants served as peer mentors. In addition, several fellows described work site supervisors, work colleagues, the previous director and me as mentors who supported, challenged and nurtured their engagement in important questions about how they can live out a

commitment to social justice and serving the common while living with integrity to their core values and beliefs.

Third, this study also affirms Parks' assertion that one way to nurture young adult faith development is through the moral imagination and the accuracy of her five basic movements of imagination as meaning making. The integrated approach of experiential learning, contemplative practice and dialogical reflection created the means for students to question their values and beliefs, to pause and reflect upon how their experiences at their work sites and in the seminar may be expanding or reshaping their worldviews, and to imagine and repattern their insights while the trusting, welcoming seminar space gave them a venue to articulate these new insights and highlight new questions.

Next, this study confirms that regular engagement in spiritual practices are essential to maintaining a vital, life affirming spiritual life. And, it confirms that it is possible to use spiritual practices from particular religious or spiritual traditions with young adults who do not identify with that or any religious tradition in ways that foster spiritual growth. As the responses suggest, the young adults in this study found value in traditional Christian practices such as the labyrinth and the Prayer of Examen and Buddhist practices of mindfulness, deep listening and walking meditation.

At the same time, some of the young people adapted particular practices in light of their religious or spiritual backgrounds. For example, I know that the Christian students used the concept of deep listening and mindfulness to focus on their relationship with God. For instance, Allen talked about how the focusing on deep listening and deep breathing led him to engage in serious introspection on the image of the Holy Spirit as the breath of God. Likewise, thinking about and practicing mindfulness led him to explore

and now regularly engage in Brother Lawrence's *Praying Along the Way*. Similarly, several of the non-Christian students used the labyrinth as a way of engaging in a mindfulness walking meditation. And Christian and non-Christian young adults described how helpful developing a rule of life based on the Christian notion of a rule of prayer was to them. Nevertheless, I continue to question how to teach spiritual practices from particular religious traditions in a way that reflects the integrity and central meaning of the practice. I also continually reflect upon how to make sure that young people understand how regular engagement in spiritual practices should nurture and sustain their commitment to community and social justice and not just serve as narcissistic, self-help techniques.

Fourth, the young people in this study articulated understandings of vocation that resonate with several of the scholars noted earlier in this paper. In particular, Allen, Stephanie and Elizabeth offered definitions of Christian vocation that reflect Fowler's expansive definition of the vocation of being human. Likewise, the former fellows valued the way in which the seminar conversations allowed them to confront difficult vocational questions such as how to serve with marginalized communities as persons of privilege. Other students, such as Sophia and Stephanie, talked about fighting the dominant social scripts of ambition and success that Brian J. Mahan describes in his own work.

Fifth, while the number of students of color in this study was quite small, the insights these students offered seem to confirm that students of color and students from ethnic minority communities face additional obstacles to their religious or spiritual growth, mental well-being and the process of discerning a vocation. For example,

Ricardo talked about how working with Latino young people facing legal problems led him to experience “vicarious trauma” and how he had to process his own feelings about his family. Yvonne described how hard it was for her to make friends as a teenager and a young woman of color in a pre-dominantly white suburb and that she arrived at college as a reserved, shy person. She grew into her sense of self through her work at an Intercultural Center and by living in a multicultural residence hall where she was able to meet and form lasting friendships with other students of color. These experiences helped her develop stronger self-confidence and empowered her to make the most of her college experience.

Nancy, who describes herself as multiracial, talked about having a painful childhood that she is still working to overcome. She realized that one of the reasons why she feels compelled to help others is tied to a sense of obligation to prevent others from experiencing the pain she felt as a young woman growing up in Nepal. She observed how her story as a multi-racial Buddhist young woman from a developing country is not valued in our culture. She added that the dynamics of gender complicate the situation for her. She discovered during the fellowship that although she was a stellar scholar and extremely gifted young woman, she could not name or claim her brilliance. She recalls that the fellowship forced her into an uncomfortable space where she had to learn to own and talk about her gifts and strengths.

Finally, over the years, my role as facilitator in the weekly seminar has evolved as I gain more experience working with talented, inspiring and, at times, vulnerable and lonely young adults. The longer I work in this vocation, the more valuable I find insights from educators like bell hooks, Kathleen T. Talvacchia and others who encourage

educators to be vulnerable in the classroom in order that they too may grow, change and be transformed through a mutually affirming and challenging learning environment.

Recommendations

In light of my research project, I offer the following recommendations for higher education and higher educational professionals who seek to foster the holistic development of their college students. First, I recommend that educators seek to offer opportunities for students to engage in integrated learning opportunities such as the fellowship that include experiential learning, critical reflection, and times for serious personal and spiritual introspection. While I would like to see programs like the fellowship offered at more institutions, there are a variety of other ways in which educators can offer similar opportunities to young people. For example, alternative winter or spring break programs can be very helpful. Even smaller or shorter term projects such as three day retreats or days of service which incorporate critical reflection can be useful. Similarly, colleges can consider how to incorporate service-based learning into academic courses.

Second, I encourage educators to consider how to incorporate contemplative practices and reflection into more curricular and co-curricular activities. My office works with campus partners to incorporate contemplative practices such as mindful walking meditation and the Prayer of Examen/the Attentiveness Practice into student leadership training. I also teach contemplative practices to students in the residence halls at their weekly hall spreads. And, critical reflection is now incorporated into many of the community service days on campus.

Third, I also recommend teaching student affairs professionals and faculty how spiritual and religious development impacts overall human development and the academic experience of young adults. For example, our campus hosted Dr. Parks who taught a workshop for all professionals in the Division of Student Affairs and she also met with select faculty to discuss how to talk about ethical and difficult topics in the classroom. In addition, it is helpful to provide opportunities for student affairs professionals and faculty to focus on their own spirituality. I have taught mindfulness and walking meditation at a division meeting and I have also worked with colleagues to offer StrengthsFinder to all of our division colleagues.

Next, I encourage interfaith directors and chaplains to think creatively about how to reach out to students who do not identify as religious or spiritual. The college at which I work is extremely secular. Many students arrive on campus with no interest in religion; others are openly hostile to religion. One way in which I try to help these students feel comfortable with our office and to see how our programs could serve them is to partner with other campus offices to sponsor events focused on social justice. I also try to attend and support the cultural or identity-based clubs on campus, including groups that support gay and lesbian students, in order to meet and build relationship with students who may have been hurt by religion, and in particular, Christianity. In so doing, I am mindful of Talvacchia's warning that I cannot force my hospitality on others.

Study Limitations

There are several important limitations to this research study. First, this study focuses on a small pool of young adults who have all graduated from the same small,

elite liberal arts college. These students are in no way representative of all undergraduate students or even all students who attend liberal arts colleges. In addition, this particular college is known as a progressive institution with a commitment to social activism and diversity. Many young adults select this college because of these expressed commitments. The college is also very expensive which raises questions about how diverse the student population is in terms of socioeconomic status and race.

Likewise, participation in the fellowship program is voluntary. The fellows who participated in this study already possessed an interest in talking about religion, spirituality and social justice before participating in the program. They were selected through a rigorous selection process which means that those who were selected were very clearly dedicated to discussing these issues.

Another related complication is the fact that I know each of the study participants very well. There are potential complications about interpreting the study results. For example, Nancy worked as a programming assistant in my office for two years. During our interview, we both tried to limit our conversation to her experiences in the fellowship but it is simply not possible to say that we completely accomplished this. Likewise, Julia and I traveled together in France, participated in two alternative spring break programs to the post-Katrina Gulf Coast together and she worked in my office for a year.

In addition, during interviews, it became clear that several of the students identified me as a mentor. While I am honored by this, I question if it made it difficult for these young adults to express disappointments or offer negative feedback about the program. Similarly, the study participants know how deeply committed I am to the fellowship. This makes objective analysis difficult.

APPENDIX A

Guidelines for Seminar Conversations⁶¹⁸

- **When listening, suspend assumptions.** It can be difficult to identify assumptions. Often, when we get upset or annoyed by something being said, we are making assumptions. When we notice that an assumption is taking over our ability to truly listen, we simply need to acknowledge the assumption silently to ourselves, suspend it for time being and return to listening. It may also help to ask the speaker clarifying questions to separate what the speaker meant to say from what we thought we heard.
- **State comments in the first person.** Use “I” statements. Share your personal response as you are informed by your tradition, beliefs and practices. Speak from your heart. Offer your authentic self.
- **Listen without judgment.** Dialogue is about developing a deeper understanding of yourself, your dialogue partners and others. When you catch yourself making judgments about what the other is saying, you can get caught in your own internal conversation and you are not truly listening to the other. Try to be present and offer your true self. Avoid labeling one another. Avoid caricatures and pigeon-holing people. Try to identify concerns, values or beliefs you have in common. Also explore what you can learn from the other’s perspective. Recognize the difference between your thoughts and your feelings.
- **Suspend status.** Every person in our seminar has equal status. We are all engaged in conversation to discern inner truth. Each of us have important gifts to share and each of us deserve to be heard.
- **Honor confidentiality.** Create a safe place for authentic dialogue by maintaining confidentiality. This means that what we say in the seminar, stays in the seminar.
- **Listen for understanding, not to agree with or believe.**
- **Ask clarifying or open-ended questions as a way of exploring assumptions.** Restate what someone has said if it is not clear to you.
- **Honor silence and time for reflection.** Listen to your inner voice to hear what wants to be said and invite your conversation partners to do likewise.
- **One person speaks at a time.** Try not to dominate the conversation. Make sure every person has an opportunity to speak.

⁶¹⁸ These guidelines are based on guidelines from the Alliance of Spiritual Community and the Listening Center as summarized by Kay Lindahl. See Kay Lindahl, *The Sacred Art of Listening: Forty Reflections for Cultivating a Spiritual Practice*, (Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths Publishing, 2002), 134-135.

Values and Vocations Fellowship The Prayer of Examen

“Before I can tell my life what I want to do with it, I must listen to my life telling me who I am. I must listen for the truths and values at the heart of my own identity, not the standards by which I must live—but the standards by which I cannot help but live if I am living my own life.”

Parker Palmer⁶¹⁹

Discernment is a way of life. Discernment empowers a person to develop intimate self knowledge and awareness of one’s true nature. As we uncover our true self, we allow our deepest dreams to motivate us into action and we rid ourselves of false securities. Discernment invites us to live a life of purpose and integrity.

Discernment is also a spiritual practice. It is the process of making choices consistent with your personal values, beliefs and commitments and in accordance with desires of the Divine or your source of ultimacy. To take the practice of discernment seriously, it is important to learn how to become attentive your inner life and your relationship to the larger world. This involves learning how to become aware of the situations, events, people or physical surroundings that make you feel alive and connected to your inner self, friends, family, or world. Likewise, learning attentiveness will help you become aware of the situations, events, people or physical surroundings that cause you to feel alienated from your inner self, friends, family or world.

The practice described below is derived from the *Prayer of Examen*. St Ignatius of Loyola is associated with this prayer practice which he incorporated into his *Spiritual Exercises*. This practice helps people to identify the causes, concerns, activities, people and places about which they are most passionate.

The Practice: This attentiveness practice invites you to reflect upon the events and moments of your day. It involves the following steps.

1. As you walk through your day, pay attention to the feelings, emotions, thoughts and physical sensations you experience as you go about your daily activities. Ask yourself how you may (or may not) be experiencing the presence of the Spirit or the ultimate in this encounter or activity.
2. At the end of the day, find a quiet space where you can center yourself. Turn off the television, the cell phone, the computer and other distractions. Sit down with both feet on the floor. Try to get comfortable but not so comfortable that you fall asleep. Take a few deep breaths to release your tension and to center yourself.

⁶¹⁹ Parker Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2000), 4-5.

3. Next, mentally review your day. Consider the places you went, the people you met and the different things you did. As you replay the day in your head, ask yourself when during the day did you feel most alive. As you recall this moment, consider what made this moment so special. Was it something you did? Was it something you received?
4. Now, consider the moment in your day for which you are least grateful. In other words, when during the day did you feel life draining out of you? As you reflect upon this moment, consider what was going on in that experience. Rather than trying to change the experience or your response to it, simply be present in the moment.
5. After you have considered both questions, give thanks for this discernment experience. You may want to reflect further by writing in a journal.

Alternative Questions: There are many ways of asking the two central questions of this practice. Here is a list of questions developed by Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn and Matthew Linn in their book *Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life*.

- *When did I give and receive the most love today? When did I give and receive the least love today?*
- *When did I feel the most alive today? When did I most feel life draining out of me?*
- *When today did I have the greatest sense of belonging to myself, others, God and the universe? When did I have the least sense of belonging?*
- *When was I happiest today? When was I saddest?*
- *What was today's high point? What was today's low point?*⁶²⁰

References:

Andrew Dreitcer, "Attentiveness: A Practice of the Spiritual Life." Prepared for IS330a, *Vocational Discernment and Formation*, the Claremont School of Theology, Claremont, CA. 2006.

Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn, Matthew Linn. *Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life*, Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995.

Parker J. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000.

⁶²⁰ Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn, Matthew Linn, *Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life*, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995), 6-7.

Values and Vocations Fellowship Prayer of Remembrance

Background: This week, I am inviting you to practice a prayer of remembrance. Through this prayer practice, you are asked to spend time in prayer reflecting upon a past experience in your life that continues to impact you today in either a positive or negative way. Through your prayer time, you are invited to draw wisdom from the past experience in dialogue with the Holy Spirit.

The beginning of a new semester is always an exciting time as we meet new professors, start new classes, and pursue new interests. At the same time, many of us may still be processing experiences from last semester. Returning to campus may cause you to remember anxieties, concerns or challenges that you were able to put on the shelf over the holiday break. Or, being back at school may help you to remember times of great joy last semester as you discovered new interests, gifts or skills within yourself. It is my hope that through prayer and reflection, you will be able to reflect upon memories from last semester in order to grow and move forward into the new semester with enthusiasm.

The Practice: This practice was developed by Teresa Blythe.⁶²¹ The practice is designed to take about 45 minutes. You may shorten the prayer experience but I encourage you to take the full 45 minutes if possible. Follow the steps below.

- Create a space for prayer. Turn off your cell phones, television, computer, and other distractions. You may want to play music softly or light a candle. You may want to have your prayer journal and a writing instrument near by. Prepare to spend 45 minutes in silence.
- Start your prayer by asking God to be present in your reflection time.
- As you settle into quiet prayer, begin thinking about your life. Turn your attention to a past experience or memory that has been on your mind. This prior experience could be a past event that continues to upset you in some way or an event that was so incredible that you want to relive it again and again. Take at least ten minutes to select your event for reflection.
- Now that you have selected your event or memory for reflection, concentrate on remembering the event. Use your senses to help you remember the event. Consider where you were when the event took place. What did you see, feel, smell, hear? Who was with you? What time of day was it? How was God present with you in the event? What does this event tell you about God? How is God present with you now as you remember this event? Spend at least ten minutes in this remembering portion of the prayer.

⁶²¹ Teresa A. Blythe, *50 Ways to Pray: Practices from Many Traditions and Times* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 61-63.

- Now you are invited to reflect upon *the process* of remembering your past event. Consider how the process of remembering the past event made you feel. When during the remembering process were you most excited or animated? Where in the remembering experience did you encounter and most feel God's presence? Where in the memory experience did you feel the most inner turmoil or conflict? Consider the feeling that was most active for you. Engage this feeling and ask God to help you reflect upon this active feeling. Spend at least ten minutes reflecting upon your active feeling.
- Now, as you move forward, spend some time talking with God about your experience both in remembering a particular event and the experience of engaging an active feeling. You may want to write an imaginary conversation between you and God in your prayer journal. As you engage in this conversation, you can imagine the setting and context and even the participants. May be you want to invite biblical characters or others into the conversation. Try to spend about 15 minutes engaged in conversation with God and other conversation partners.
- Close your prayer time by thanking God and your conversation partners. Give thanks for the memory, prayer experience and new learning or gifts that came from the remembering experience.

Values and Vocations Fellowship Ultimate Questions

Background: This contemplative practice is based on practice first developed by Teresa Blythe in her book *50 Ways to Pray*.⁶²² Through this prayer or guided reflection, you are invited to contemplate some of the central questions of human existence.

The Practice: The key to this practice is being totally honest about your answers to the questions. Sometimes, these questions may push you to consider new ideas or to relinquish old beliefs.

- Begin by creating a quiet space for prayer or contemplation. Turn off the television, the cell phones, the computer, and other distractions. Create a sacred place by lighting a candle, turning off some lights or playing soft music.
- Pick a question from the list provided to consider during your prayer or contemplative time. You may want to take out your journal and write down the question.
- Sit down in a comfortable position but not so comfortable that you fall asleep. Take a few deep breaths to release your tension or stress. Begin your prayer or contemplation by inviting the Divine (or whatever you consider your source of ultimacy) to be present with you as you consider the question you have selected.
- Read the question to yourself. Spend some time in silence reflecting upon the question. Allow yourself to just sit with the question. Do not try to answer it. Just ponder all the layers of meaning in and behind the question.
- After a few minutes, consider the question again. Ask yourself: What in this question appeals to me? Why I did pick this question to answer? What in this question challenges me?
- Now, try to answer this question. As you answer the question, consider this: How is the Divine (or whatever you consider your source of ultimacy) present with you in either the question or your reflection on the question?
- End by giving thanks for this time contemplation.

⁶²² Teresa A. Blythe, *50 Ways to Pray: Practices from Many Traditions and Times* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 63-67.

Suggested Questions

- What do you care about most in life?
- Do you have an understanding of God, the Divine, the Sacred, a Higher Power? If so, how are you invited into relationship with this Other?
- How do you understand what it means to be human?
- How do you feel about the different communities to which you belong? Are these communities life-giving and affirming to you? In what way?
- Can you remember a time when you engaged in an act of justice? What did you do and how did you feel about what you did? What was the outcome of your action?
- Can you remember a time when someone acted with compassion towards you? Who was this person? What happened? What can you learn about yourself and what it means to be compassionate from this experience?
- What are your fears, concerns or unanswered questions?
- What are your deepest longings?
- What do you want the future to look like—for yourself, for others, and for your planet?
- What is society asking of you?

For people who identify as theists:

- When did you first notice the presence of God in your life?
- What do you most want from God?
- Can you remember a time when God intervened in your life?
- Can you remember a time in your life when you were in pain or experiencing turmoil and you still felt the presence of the Divine?

The Values and Vocations Fellowship

Lectio Divina

Background: *Lectio Divina*, which literally means “sacred reading” in Latin, is a practice people have used to prayerfully read the Holy Scriptures since the first centuries of Christianity. As early as the fourth century, Christian monks living in the desert of Egypt wrote about meditating upon scripture as a way of maintaining one’s spiritual well-being and encountering sin.⁶²³ Through a series of steps, you are invited to let the words of the ancient text literally become alive within you. In so doing, the words become a source of comfort, healing, and/or challenge.

The Practice: This traditional practice is based on four movements known in Latin as *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio*, and *contemplatio*. These steps are noted below.

1. *Lectio* – Reading: The first step is to select a short text that you would like to use for your sacred reading. Try to pick a short passage. After you have selected your text, begin to read the passage to yourself very slowly. Read it at least two times. As you read the text, try to identify a word or phrase that speaks to your heart. Is there a particular phrase or word or image that captures your attention? Read the text as many times as necessary as you seek to identify your particular word or phrase. Do not rush; allow the word to choose you.

2. *Meditatio* – Meditation: Now that you have selected your word or phrase, meditate on this word. Allow the word to engage you fully. You may want to write it down or repeat it to yourself several times. Ask yourself how the Divine or your source of ultimate wisdom may be using this word or phrase to catch your attention. Does the word or phrase connect with some aspect of your life right now or some experience in your past? As you reflect upon the word or phrase, consider your own physical, spiritual and mental reaction to the word. What kind of energy does reflecting upon this word evoke in you? What emotions, memories, dreams or experiences does this word bring to you? What is the ultimate trying to say to you through the word, phrase, or the larger text?

3. *Oratio* – Responsive Prayer: *Oratio* relates to verbal expression and this third stage of *lectio divina* invites you to offer your words of prayer or meditation. Let your thoughts and/or prayer emerge from your reaction to the word or phrase you have chosen. Share your emotions and feelings with the Divine or ultimate source. Express fully and honestly the concerns and joys on your heart.

4. *Contemplatio* – Contemplation: This last step is a time for simply rest. Spend time in silence as you let go of your thoughts, questions and feelings.

⁶²³ Andrew Deeter Dreitcer, *Roles of the Bible in Christian Spirituality: A Study of Seven Congregations* (PhD diss., Ann Arbor: UMI, 1993), 21.

Nontraditional Approaches to Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina with Music: This practice invites you to reflect upon a piece of music. Through reflectively listening to a particular piece of music, you are invited into a time of contemplative prayer, meditation or reflection. You may choose any type of music (instrumental or vocal) from whatever genre or style that inspires you. I recommend selecting a piece of music that you already know and that has inspired or moved you in the past. Follow these basic steps:

- Choose your music.
- Begin with silence. As you enter into a contemplative spirit, invite the Divine or your source of ultimate wisdom to be present in this time of reflection.
- Listen to your musical selection several times. As you listen to the song, take note of any word, phrase, image, emotion or memory that this particular song may bring to your attention.
- Select an image, word or phrase for reflection. Center yourself around this image, word or phrase. Allow the image, word or phrase to lead you into contemplation. Consider what this word, image or phrase may have to say to you today. What about this word, image or phrase speaks to you? Is the Source inviting you to consider particular questions or thoughts by elevating this word to your attention?
- Rest silently with your word, image or phrase. Consider now your experience of contemplation or prayer through this reflective process. Is there something you would like to share with the Divine or others about your experience of contemplatively listening to music? You may want to write about your experience in your journal.
- Take time now to simply rest in silence.
- End your time by giving thanks for what you have experienced during this time of prayer.

Lectio Divina with Nature: This practice invites you to connect the natural world around you. The steps are as follows.

- Begin by sitting in silence in nature. Invite the Divine or the Source of ultimate wisdom to join you in this time of contemplation or prayer.
- Take a walk in nature. Look at the natural world around you. As you look around, turn your attention on a particular piece of nature that draws your interest. It could be something incredibly beautiful or unattractive. Focus on

whatever piece of nature that gives you the most energy. Look closely at this piece of nature. (*Lectio*)

- Be present with the piece of nature that is drawing your energy and attention. Think about what you know about this part of nature. Are there connections between this piece of nature and your own life? What might the ultimate be saying to you with this encounter with nature? Pay attention to your feelings as you engage these questions. (*Meditatio*)
- Begin to communicate with your inner self and the ultimate as you respond to your reflection on nature. Share your feelings, physical sensations, and other experiences. (*Oratio*)
- Now simply rest and give thanks for the opportunity to contemplate nature. Celebrate your connection to the world around you. (*Contemplatio*)

Resources:

Blythe, Teresa A. *Fifty Ways to Pray: Practices from Many Traditions and Times* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006).

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APPENDIX B

Questionnaire/Interview Questions
The Rev. Susan E. Young

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. Please complete the following questionnaire. If you do not feel comfortable answering a particular question, feel free to leave it blank. If you do not know how to answer a question, please say so. If you do not think the question is applicable to you, write n/a.

Your answers will be used for research purposes only and your identity will be kept confidential. By completing this questionnaire, you are granting me permission to use this material in my dissertation. Please email or mail the questionnaire back to me.

Name:

Current age:

Year graduated from College:

College academic major:

Current Occupation:

How do you name your racial/ethnic identity?

Please describe your spiritual or religious background.

- Were you raised in a particular religious or spiritual tradition?
- Did your family discuss religious or spiritual issues, concerns or beliefs while you were growing up?

Please describe your current understanding of religion or spirituality.

- Do you identify with a particular religious or spiritual tradition?

- Do you contemplate particular religious or spiritual questions? If so, please identify.
- Do you engage in any religious or spiritual practices on a regular basis? If so, please identify these practices.

Please describe your current occupational or vocational ambitions.

Please describe your participation in the program under investigation.

- When did you participate?
- Did you participate for one semester, two semesters and/or the summer program?
- Please identify your work site for each time you participated in the program.
- What specific projects did you work on at each site?
- What do you remember about your work site experience? Did you find the work to be meaningful, challenging, or rewarding in any way?
- What do you remember about the particular people you worked with? Did any of these people serve as a personal role model or mentor for you? In what way?

- Would you recommend this work site to others?

Below is a list of contemplative practices typically practiced in the program. Please check the practices you remember engaging as part of the program.

- _____ Prayer of Examen or Attentiveness Practice
- _____ Lectio Divina or Sacred Reading
- _____ Prayer or Meditation for the World
- _____ Praying or Engaging the Questions
- _____ Walking the labyrinth
- _____ Mindfulness and walking meditation
- _____ Mandalas
- _____ Deep listening
- _____ Buddhist meditation
- _____ Yoga
- _____ Saying Mantras
- _____ Developing a Rule of Prayer or Rule of Life

Which, if any, of these practices did you find helpful, meaningful or inspiring? Please indicate how or why you identified these particular practices.

Do you continue to engage any of these practices today?

Below is a list of exercises typically engaged in the seminar. Please check the exercises you remember engaging.

- _____ Values Clarification Exercises
- _____ Journaling
- _____ Completing and interpreting StrengthsQuest
- _____ Reflections on work site experiences
- _____ Book readings and discussions
- _____ Small group conversations about spirituality
- _____ Small group conversations about social justice
- _____ Small group conversations about vocation or meaningful work
- _____ Small group conversations about developing and maintaining appropriate boundaries.

_____ Small group conversations about maintaining one's spiritual, mental and physical health.

Were any of these exercises particularly rewarding, challenging or inspiring? Please describe.

How would you describe the role the program played in your intellectual growth?

How would you describe the role the program played in your religious, spiritual and ethical development?

How would you describe the role the program played in discerning a potential career?

Would you recommend the program to others?

Please share any other thoughts or comments about the program.

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